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THE CITY OF REFUGE

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'CHILDREN OF GIBEON,'

'THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

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PREFACE

As I have received certain questions and heard certain irresponsible criticisms concerning alleged rapidity of production, based on the appearance of the 'City of Refuge' only a few months after that of the 'Master Craftsman,' I think it is necessary to explain that the former was written for serial publication in the *Pall Mall Magazine* for last year, 1895, and in accordance with that arrangement the story occupied me during the greater part of the year 1894; that it was not found convenient to carry out the original intention, and that the serial publication was therefore deferred until the

present year, viz., from April to October. Again, if the matter concerns anybody, I might mention that it would be to me, and I believe to everybody, utterly impossible to write two novels at the same time.

Certain alterations and additions to the story, as it appeared in the magazine, may, perhaps, be noted by any reader who first saw it in serial form.

W. B.

United University Club,
September 1896.

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THE CITY OF REFUGE

PROLOGUE.

WHO SHALL RID ME?

'GILBERT! At last!'

She had been leaning forward, her hands clasped over her knees, staring straight before her; her eyes were angry and hard —there were black rings round them; her face was pale; her look was set; and her lips were drawn as one who suffers physical pain.

On the floor there rolled about a child of a year and a half. The nurse, who had brought in the boy, thinking to distract

her mistress in this mysterious trouble, stood watching at the door, for the mother seemed not even to know that the child was there. Great, indeed, must be the trouble when even the child could remain unnoticed.

She sprang to her feet with a cry. 'At last!' she repeated, and gave her visitor both hands—nay, she seized him by both hands—the action was like the despairing clutch of one who is drowning, one over whom the waves are sinking for the last time. 'Gilbert! You have come!'

Then the nurse, who was an intelligent young person, stepped forward and carried off the child. Mr. Gilbert had come home. Everybody knew that whatever was wrong would be set right when Mr. Gilbert came home. This belief, which was universal, is almost enough by itself to explain Mr. Gilbert.

'I reached home the day before yester-

day. I received your note this morning. I came on to town at once. Now, my dear Dorabyn——'

She threw up her arms. 'Oh! I must tell someone, or I shall go mad.'

'Tell me, then, as much or as little as you please. What you said in your note is the most wonderful thing, the most incredible thing——'

'Use up all the adjectives in the language, and you will not find one that is adequate. My husband, as I told you, is actually, literally, and irretrievably ruined: nay, what I did not write, he is disgraced, degraded—among those few who know—sent out of the country.'

'Disgraced? Sir Charles?' Gilbert gasped with bewilderment. 'But — but — how?' Because, you see, a man may go very far indeed before all these things happen to him —ruin, disgrace, exile. Many doors may be closed to the wicked man; but this is a

world of various standards : many others still remain open to him—doors of other wicked men's houses : the world is full of wicked men. What could Sir Charles Osterley have done so miraculously wicked as to bring all these things upon his head ?

Yet the face of the woman showed that she was not exaggerating. Never had Gilbert seen that face, which he knew very well indeed, in all its moods, betray such a tumult of emotions. She was, to begin with, the proudest, coldest woman, outwardly, in all England : too proud to betray the least sign of weakness at any possible or conceivable disaster. But her pride was broken down in the presence of disaster inconceivable, impossible, irretrievable ; one that would be felt by the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generation ; unless — which seemed impossible — something could still be done.

'I sent for you, Gilbert. You are my

oldest friend—at such a moment as this you seem to be my only friend.'

Gilbert was one of those very rare creatures who have received the gift of making every woman—except the shrew, the termagant, the envious, the evil speaker, the liar, the slanderer, and the Devil—his close and personal friend in a very surprising manner and in an incredibly brief space of time. I know not how the thing is done; of all the gifts and graces bestowed upon man it is the most enviable: in my own experience I have known but two or three men who possess this gift. Mere cleverness will not command that power; by no accomplishments, arts, intellect, or worldly success can any man acquire it: one must be born with it; women, in fact, are not generally so very greatly moved by superiority of intellect or accomplishments, or success, things which they regard either as means of making money, like an office in the City; or as so

many parlour tricks, like playing the zither. It is a gift of the gods; it is a heaven-descended power. Gilbert had it; there is no more to be said about it. With Lady Osterley, however, he was a really old friend —a friend of youth: they were of the same age; they grew up together; as a boy, he received all her confidences. When all the world fell in love with her for her beauty, which was cold, and for her money-bags, which were heavy, Gilbert did not. He remained her friend and continued to receive her confidences.

And now, what had happened?

'How, my dear Dorabyn?' Gilbert repeated. 'I read in the paper——' he had the *Times* rolled up in his hand. He opened it and read: '"The announcement made in another column of the resignation and retirement into private life of Sir Charles Osterley will surprise most of our readers, and cause great regret on both sides of the House.

That the nation should lose at so early an age the services of a statesman who has already acquired the confidence of his countrymen for probity, clearness of head, and a masterly grip of the problems of the day, is nothing less than a national disaster."'

'"National disaster,"' Dorabyn repeated. 'Go on, Gilbert: "national disaster." Is there more?'

'Yes, there is more. "It is understood that the decision arrived at by Sir Charles is final. Long though his life may be spared, there is no hope, it is said, that he will ever be able to return to the field of politics. This surrender of a career is not, we understand, suddenly forced upon Sir Charles. He has had it in contemplation for some time, though hitherto he has been able to entertain some hope that his symptoms would take a favourable turn. That hope has now been abandoned. While the country regrets, on its own account, to lose the services of

this young statesman, we must not forget the sympathies which we must extend to Sir Charles on the loss of most that he prized——"'

'"Most that he prized,"' Lady Osterley repeated bitterly.

'"We must not forget what this blow means to a man in his position."'

'Ah!' said Lady Osterley, 'if only the writer knew what it really does mean to him! But I should like to hear what he thinks it means.'

'"Loss of place; loss of power; loss of those higher offices—even the highest—which would probably have fallen to him in due time; loss of rank, if he desired higher rank——"'

'He desired everything, Gilbert—everything. I hope that he will buy a copy of this paper. It should be pleasant reading.'

'"These are grievous losses,"' Gilbert went on reading: '"it requires great philo-

sophy or great resignation to lose these things just as they seemed within reach. But there is more. It is the laudable ambition of every statesman to occupy a page in history: for this young statesman, cut off, so to speak, at the outset, there is no such place possible. And again, it is reasonable to suppose that every statesman looks forward with hope to the passing of broad and wide measures, conducive to the public welfare. The nobler part of such a man survives in the services, the harvest-bearing services, which in his lifetime he is privileged to render to his country. All these things and more have been lost by Sir Charles Osterley."'

'You have read enough,' said the wife: 'I hope that he will read it too, and that the words may become to him a scourge of scorpions. Oh! Gilbert, I am becoming like a railing fishwife. But you will calm me. Oh, my dear Gilbert!'—she laid her

sisterly head upon his shoulder—'you have come home in my direst need. You will tell me what to do.'

'Well—but there is nothing in this paper about degradation.'

'Yet the man is degraded. First of all, he is not stricken with any disease at all—he is quite well and strong. Next, he will go abroad immediately, because he must. Thirdly, he will never dare to return again. Give me a minute or two—to recover—Gilbert.' She walked to the window and looked out. Then she turned. 'You are looking well. That is the photograph of my boy: did you know I had a boy?' She went on saying things conventional, without meaning, as if speaking unconsciously. Then she left the window and fell into silence, standing on the hearthrug, gazing into the fire.

A tall and handsome woman; something reginal in her appearance; a woman born for authority and high place. Her neck looked

as if diamonds would grace it; her dark hair looked as if it wanted the gleam of a coronet; upon her shoulders lay the queenly drapery of costly lace. In ancient days she would have been a queen or a countess by right of her beauty; for, of course, none but one of the conquering race could produce a woman so victorious. In later—say Tudor—times, Dorabyn, as the Lady Imperia or as the Lady Gloriana, would have led after her an ever-lengthening chain of captive lovers: they would have fought for her; they would have written poetry about the sunlight in her eyes and the tangles of her hair and the blinding splendour of her face. In the restricted manner possible for a self-governed age, which does not understand flames and darts and raptures and swoonings, which is comparatively passionless, Dorabyn could only follow the example of Lady Imperia at a distance. She had many admirers: all the men admired her; some dared to make

love to her, but were speedily dismissed; she was gracious always, as becomes a gentlewoman, but she did not invite the wooing of the casual youth of the period. And as to marriage she had her own ideas. 'I understand very well,' she wrote in one of her letters to Gilbert, 'that marriage is a partnership in which the man must have the nominal command; the woman's is the second place. This must always be the case, in spite of the advanced woman, unless man becomes a contemptible creature. I will accept the second place when I can find a lover whom I can obey without losing my esteem. He will be a man whom I must respect for many qualities —intellect in the first place. And I should like him to be a man whom the world has already learned to respect.'

Presently there came along such a man: he was young; he was in the House; he had already made something of a name; he

was a man of practical affairs ; he could make the driest subject interesting in a speech ; he was a man of family ; he was a handsome man. He had also the reputation of being a proud and reserved man. The marriage was arranged at a time when Gilbert was travelling about the world. Six months after the marriage Sir Charles Osterley's party came in, and he was made Under Secretary for the Fisheries—a very good beginning on the official ladder.

And it was upon such a woman as this, holding such a position, with such prospects, that disgrace of the most horrible kind, shame unspeakable, the ruin of ambition, the loss of social position, and, worse still, a blight upon the whole life of her boy, had fallen. Nothing more terrible, as you shall see immediately, could have happened.

As for Gilbert Maryon, for whom Lady Osterley sent, he was neither her brother, nor her cousin, nor her lover. He was the

son of her guardian, and they were brought up together. And because Gilbert was strong and brave and always helped her along when she was a girl, and always looked up to her and thought for her, she believed in him more than sisters believe in brothers, or maidens believe in lovers: she told him everything; and when they were separated she wrote to him about everything.

The kind of confidential attachment—neither friendship nor love, but an exalted form of the former—which sometimes exists between two persons not of the same sex may be a most delightful thing for both shepherd and nymph, provided that it does not degenerate into the less exalted passion. It is an education for a girl, because she will not willingly suffer anything mean or base to enter into her letters or her words. She must rise to the situation: the height to which she rises is measured by the mental

stature of the man. Now, Gilbert was taller than most men; therefore Dorabyn became a girl of higher standards than content many of her sisters.

Such a confidential attachment may be, in fact, more satisfying than love, because the girl gets all the sympathy that she needs for herself. In too many cases the lover regards his mistress mainly as the giver of sympathy, not the recipient: he talks to her entirely about himself, and expects her to listen. Now, Gilbert Maryon asked for nothing for himself; he gave all that he had to give, which was an amazing store of sympathy, interest, and counsel, to the girl, and wanted nothing in return. As for love, why, of course—but not in that way.

As for Gilbert, Lady Osterley's confidential friend, he was, to look at, the ordinary young man of this generation, which is a handsome, athletic generation; he was not quite the ordinary young man, because he was pos-

sessed of large brains: he took a First in something or other; then, which is also not common, he had a moderate fortune, and belonged to a respectable family. He also had good manners, a kindly disposition, and a pleasant voice. Like many young men of fortune, he travelled: he shot big game; he spent a summer among Eskimo; he climbed the Andes; he learned that Eton, Trinity, the West End, and the country house are not everything; and he acquired that attractive kind of contempt for things in general, especially things connected with money-getting, which men who roam and ramble and have plenty of money for themselves do easily acquire. Nobody, you see, despises money-getting quite so much as the young man of generous instincts who is born rich.

Now, you have heard that Gilbert made every woman his friend. Yet, so far, his name had never been associated with that of any woman. You know the story of Petit

Jehan de Saintré: how the continual contemplation of the perfections of his mistress made him blind to every other woman; his case, we are told, though I find it hard to believe, was common in that day. It is now uncommon, yet not impossible.

Gilbert's ideal woman grew up in his mind out of those letters. He found in the world plenty of charming women, but not that woman. Dorabyn herself was not that woman. He fell, in fact, into the danger connected with ideals: he found no one like unto his ideal. Not that he was always looking out for his ideal, or yearning for it. Not at all. Only that smaller women did not attract him. The thing is exactly like acquiring a taste for the very finest claret: an inferior vintage ceases to please, yet the lower creation laps it up with avidity. Give me, however, an honest liking for such wine as I can afford to buy. Give me the power of worshipping such a woman as I can expect

to win. And since, fortunately, women do not grow really more noble or finer as they go up the ladder of rank, the latter petition must be referred to the mental and moral limitations of the lover. Put it in another form. In order to ensure happiness, which is contentment, let us not be too much in advance of our friends or our income.

'Now,' said Gilbert, when Dorabyn had been silent for two minutes, 'tell me what you really mean.'

He sat down, and leaning against the arm of his chair he showed the ear and the side face of the listener. To look at her with full face might make things more difficult.

'Tell me,' he repeated, in his gentle and persuasive voice, 'all that you choose to tell.'

'It seems so dreadful that no one warned me. Some one must have known.'

'I wish I had been at home, Dorabyn—though I knew nothing.'

'Do you think a man can go on for ever doing things without being found out?'

'I don't know. Some men do. I never heard anything about Sir Charles. At the same time I did not know him; we belonged to different sets. For my own part, I have very little sympathy with the parliamentary hand. The party politician, always angling for more votes, does not interest me.'

'You know everybody. Do you think that anyone suspects—things about Sir Charles?'

'What should anyone suspect? I assure you no one, so far as I know, suspects anything at all in Sir Charles except that he is ambitious. What should a traveller like me know of the scandals, if there are any, of the day?'

'Then, Gilbert,' she sat upright and forced herself to speak plainly, yet could not bring herself to a simple statement of fact, 'could you believe that this man who looks so superior—this man with the cold eyes and

the proud face and the austere voice—is nothing better than—oh!—all that we read about?'

'One can believe anything about any man, if the thing is proved.'

'It seemed to promise so well. There was everything. He was the most promising man of the time; he was good in conversation; he was a handsome man—I care something about that: it is true, he did not make violent love; but he was well bred and quiet over it—which was a change, after some of them. And his people were pleasant. Why did no one tell me?'

'First, I repeat, no one knew anything at all against him. Next, everybody thought that ambition entered into that marriage. Perhaps, if a woman marries for ambition she has less right than other women to look into the past life.'

'Perhaps you thought I was marrying for position.'

'Well, Dorabyn, you wrote to me fully at the time—I got your letter, I remember, in British Columbia—and you allowed me to believe that love had very little to do with it.'

'Love had nothing at all to do with it, Gilbert,' she confessed. 'I did marry him entirely for ambition. I thought I should like to be the wife of a great statesman. It is a very fine position indeed—far better than any coronet can give. But I did think I could respect him. And now you see the end of my noble ambition.'

'I shall see it, I dare say, presently.'

'Then you will tell me what I shall do, Gilbert. Because I do not know. My letters!' she went on. 'My letters! Oh! what things I have said to you. Gilbert, you are my father confessor. I wonder if any woman ever took any man so completely into her confidence.'

'It seems as if I know you so well, Dorabyn, that I know beforehand all that

you will do under any given circumstance. It would always be the best and the wisest thing to do.'

She walked again to the window and looked out: the rain was falling on the asphalte of a London road in South Kensington. She turned and took up one trifle after another on the table: when one is mentally perturbed these trifles seem to bring relief; people in great trouble always talk of things irrelevant, or occupy their minds for a moment with a trifle. I read, once, of a murderer who, on being arrested, pleasantly took up a shell from the mantelshelf and called attention to the singular beauty of its colouring. It was a relief from the terrible tension of his mind, you see. Gilbert sat in the same attitude, not moving—still with the side face.

'You were married,' Gilbert reminded her quietly.

'Yes. Yes, I was married. I was going

to be proud of him. Proud! Oh! Heavens! Things began directly upon our marriage.'

'What things?'

'You shall hear. The honeymoon was tedious, and we came back to town after a week or two. Then Things began. Oh! it was line upon line, and precept upon precept. The first blow fell the day after our return. His solicitor called. You must know that we have never had any vulgar quarrels. Charles was not that kind of man. Everything has been most politely managed by an aged, bland, respectable old gentleman. Never was a woman led into the Valley of Humiliation more politely. Nobody could be more polite, more religiously polite, than this old solicitor. I always think of him as an Archbishop.'

'Well?'

'The first thing he broke to me—oh! with the utmost kindness, and as if it was an unexpected, sudden disaster, which nobody

could understand—was that Sir Charles had already gone through the whole of his property. He had married me simply for my fortune: this was a pleasing discovery for a woman who thought something of herself. Well, I had enough to carry on the house, and it didn't seem to matter very much. Speculation on the Stock Exchange, this dear old man called it. I accepted the statement. As my husband was going to be Prime Minister some day, I accepted it without a murmur.'

'I fear it pains you to tell me these things, Dorabyn.'

'Not so much as to brood over them in silence. The second blow fell when the Archbishop called again. He came to tell me, with sympathy most profound, that my husband had lost a large sum of money—many thousand pounds—which must be paid for him, in order to escape dishonour. Stock Exchange, he sweetly called it, again. When

I refused to listen to any talk about Stock Exchange debts, he confessed that it was a gambling debt. And then the whole thing came out. The old man warned me plainly that one of two things would certainly happen. Either I should ruin myself in paying Charles's gambling debts, or he would fail to pay them and be expelled from his clubs, which would be social extinction. He has been, all the time, in spite of his austerity and his hard looks, a gambler *acharné:* there is a club to which he belongs where there is an inner circle: they play constantly; they play very high; they never talk about their play.'

'You paid that money?'

'He was going to become Prime Minister. One would give a great deal to become the wife of the Premier. Yes, I paid it. But as he had married me for my money I let him understand that henceforth he would get nothing but the money. So we parted, yet he remained under this roof. Was that right?'

'It seems right. Did you have to give more money?'

'Yes. Much more money. My once large fortune, Gilbert, has been seriously impaired. The man is insatiable: he would drink up all the money in the world. I made up my mind, at last, that even to become the wife of the Premier one might pay too high a price. And besides, there was the boy to consider. I sent him word by the Archbishop that I would not give him another penny. That message, I suppose, was the cause of what has happened.'

'Yes?'

'I let the child go out just now because I could not bear to think that, even at his tender age, he should hear this terrible and shameful thing.'

She could not, still, bear to tell it; she kept approaching the thing—talking about it—going away from it.

'It is the final blow,' she went on, once

more fencing with it. 'It is, I do believe, the most terrible thing that has ever happened to any woman. Gambler or not, I could still take pride in his success. I could endure even to be ruined if it were not for the boy. Many most honourable men have ruined their wives at the green table Even then I could still be proud of him for his eloquence and his intellect. But this—this—oh! who can bear it?—who can bear it?' She wrung her hands—her cheek was hot and flushed —there were no tears in her eyes. 'Who can bear such a blow, Gilbert?'

'Again, Dorabyn, do not pain yourself to tell me.'

'I tell you it is worse to be silent with it. And nobody knows except you and me and the man to whom it happened. Oh! let me try to tell it exactly as it happened. It was two or three days ago—I don't know when. He sat down to play at this club with his gambling friends. He had no money at all;

there was nothing at his bank; to play at all was worse than madness; yet he played. He knew that I would give him no more money; he could not possibly pay the smallest loss; he knew that, for the sake of the boy, I was inflexible. Yet he played. And he lost. When they left off he had lost over three thousand pounds.'

'Yes—over three thousand pounds.'

'Next day he paid his debts in full, as a man of honour must.'

'His cheques were refused?'

'Not at all: the cheques were honoured. Because, you see, a letter with a cheque for £3,500 had that morning been received at his bank; and the cheque was for the account of Sir Charles Osterley.'

'Well?'

'The cheque and the letter purported to come from my cousin, Lord Richborough.'

'And they did not?'

'No. They were forgeries. My husband forged them.'

'But — Good Heavens! Was he stark, staring mad?'

'I suppose that he reasoned this way. "No one will know who forged the cheque and sent the letter. I will say that I know nothing about it. My wife will give back the money to her cousin." But I don't know how he reasoned. A gambler is a madman.'

'Was the fact proved?'

'Yes. Beyond the possibility of any doubt. The handwriting was his—it was impossible to doubt this; there was the fact that, a day or two before, he had sent for his bank-book, so that he knew there was nothing to his credit; and yet that morning he drew cheques for over three thousand pounds. And the forged cheque was torn out of his own book; for Lord Richborough and he had the same bank. The thing was quite simple as soon as the handwriting of the letter was discovered.'

'Well?'

'My cousin called upon him, and charged him point-blank with the fact. At first he expressed astonishment. Then my cousin explained the evidence of the case. And then he confessed.'

'Confessed? Good Heavens!' Gilbert was no longer listening with an impassive side face, like a father confessor; he was sitting upright in his chair facing the unhappy woman, with amazement written all over him. 'He confessed?'

'My cousin anticipated this confession, and he had made up his mind what to do. He said that he would honour the cheque, so as to save a scandal: this he would do for my sake; but on conditions. Sir Charles must go away and kill himself as the price of silence. He pointed out that in this way Charles's honour, and my honour, and my son's honour would be preserved, and no one would ever know the real reason of the

suicide. Would you believe it? He refused! Coward!—Coward!—Coward!' She wrung her hands passionately.

'Coward!' Gilbert echoed.

'Then my cousin, again for my sake, gave him another choice. If he would, that very day, resign everything—his post, his political career, his seat, his clubs—and leave the country never to return, he would not prosecute. He left the wretched man to find his own excuses; for his own part he promised—for my sake—silence. If he refused this offer he would be prosecuted in a court of justice.'

'A dreadful alternative. And then?'

'He accepted. He went out of that room. Oh! Gilbert, much as I loathe and hate the man, I cannot bear to think of it; he went out of that room, I was told, with—what shall I say?—the white despair of a man disgraced stamped upon his face. I try not to remember his agony at that moment, for fear

of pitying the man. My cousin, who brought me the story, told me that the sight made him tremble. The tears came into his eyes while he told me. Oh, the horror of it! Oh, the shame of it! Gilbert! Think of it! He went out fallen—changed from a gentleman into a detected rogue, with the full knowledge of what detection meant to a man in his position! Oh! think of it—think of it! How could he?'

'Indeed—how could he?' What more could Gilbert say? There are no words of consolation in such a case as this. Nothing can console.

'In the morning—yesterday morning—his solicitor came—the Archbishop. He assumed a face of deep sympathy: I had no doubt heard from Sir Charles of this sudden break-down—"long threatened, dear Madam, long expected, borne with fortitude." I wonder how much he knows of the story. Sir Charles, he said, was ordered, as his only

chance, to go abroad immediately. As he said nothing, not even by way of keeping up appearances, of my going to see the man, I take it that he knows, or suspects, a good deal. But he will not talk. Meantime, on the subject of money. It was for no gambling debt, he explained, that he asked for money; but when a man smitten by sudden sickness—this old Pecksniff never even smiled—is told that his one chance is to go abroad, why, he must have some money to go with. "I do not say," he admitted, "that my client has behaved well; however, forgiveness is the act of a Christian; he must have money, and perhaps under all the circumstances"—I think he guesses pretty well what they are—"it will be best for you to give him what he wants." So I gave him a cheque for £500, with the firm assurance that nothing in the world would ever induce me to give him any more; that he might starve—and so on. I spare you

the rest, Gilbert. Then I heard that you were at home, and I wrote to you. And you have come. There, Gilbert! you know all—and a very pretty whole it makes.'

'Yes,' he said: 'this is the most miserable business I have ever heard. My poor Dorabyn! But the man has gone out of your sight. That is something.'

'But not out of my life. Oh, Gilbert—help me to drive him out of my life. All the world is told that Sir Charles has been sent away hastily—smitten with some sudden disease. That fiction will have to be kept up, I suppose, till people begin to forget him.'

'People forget very easily nowadays. In a week it will be as if Sir Charles had never existed.'

'How can I go about—meet my friends—with this guilty knowledge?'

'Not guilty, Dorabyn.'

'Shameful knowledge, then. I am a wife,

but not a wife; a widow whose husband is still living: my husband is a guilty and shameful wretch of whom all the world speaks well. Why am I not abroad with him in his illness? Why have I deserted him?'

'Where is he now?'

'I don't know. He must go to America, I believe. Gone to take another name in some place where his face is not known. He can never come back here again. He could never bear to face that story. Meanwhile, I remain——'

'Yes.'

He used the word as indicating reflection.

'I remain. Do you understand what that means? He goes away, stricken down by disease, followed by the sympathy of the world. I—his stony-hearted wife, the only one who does not feel for him—remain.'

'Yes.'

'Another thing. He vanishes. He wanders about the world. Whether he lives or

dies I know not. I shall never know, for he will be too proud—he has that one quality left of his birth and education—to tell anyone who he is. I am therefore bound to him, perhaps, for more than his life; for years after he may have gone to gamble and to commit forgeries in the other world.'

'Yes.'

'Still another thing. On every side there are difficulties. There are his own people: he has any number of people. They will all be wanting to know every day where he is, how he is. Good Heavens! There is his mother, there is his sister: they must never know—any more than my boy. And there are my own people as well. Of course they will want to know what it all means—where he is and how he is. And his political friends, they have already begun to send letters and messages: his private secretary came this morning, and the newspaper people are besieging the house. Good Heavens,

Gilbert! I believe I shall go mad with it all.'

'You would not call a few of his friends together and let them understand in general terms something of the truth?'

'No—no—NO!' she cried vehemently. 'No one must ever suspect. My boy must grow up to respect his father, whom all the world respected, as well as his mother, who cruelly suffered him to go away alone—perhaps to die.'

'Perhaps to die. Dorabyn—if he were to die!'

'He will not. He is too strong.'

'If you were to go to your country house and fall ill—shock to nerves—and remain ill——'

'No. They would all run down to see me.'

'You might send round a paragraph to the effect that Sir Charles had mysteriously disappeared——'

'He would most certainly be discovered.'

'Then, Dorabyn, there seems only one thing to do. Go and live abroad—or travel abroad where English people do not resort.'

Dorabyn broke down. She sank into a chair and burst into tears.

'Oh!' she cried, 'there is nothing but continual deception! And the thing so hopeless!'

'Nay, after a year or two you can return. You can tell his people that you have had to separate from him.'

'But there is the boy. What am I to say to him?'

'We might advertise the death of the man.'

'And he would be seen the next day in the streets of Paris. Oh, Gilbert, cannot even you help me? I have always thought you were so clever and so strong.'

'If you were free from this man.' Gilbert rose slowly—his face was very troubled: he

bent over the weeping woman, and his eyes became humid—he could have wept with her. It was terrible to see this queenly woman broken down with shame that seemed hopeless, except on one chance.

When the valiant knight of old rode out to deliver the helpless maiden from monsters, giants, dragons, and loathly worms, it was not because he was in love with that maiden. Not at all. Occasionally, it is true, love came after rescue; but not always, nor, indeed, as a rule.

Gilbert was not in love with this *belle Dame*—not at all: but she was his sister and his friend; she was in sore trouble; and only one thing could help her.

There was in Gilbert something of the knight errant: he might become on occasion like the noble-hearted hidalgo, Don Quixote; he could rise to the height of throwing away his own life, even for a woman whom he did not love in earthly fashion: the power of

throwing away one's life seldom survives the age of one-and-twenty, in the world of society. But Gilbert was a traveller; in the lonely woods and mountains, among simple folk, the ancient virtues still survive: that is one way of explaining what follows.

'If you were free from this man,' he repeated. 'If you were free from him! You cannot get a divorce from him. There is only one. . . . Why'—his face cleared; he smiled; he looked cheerful and confident again—'of course!' he added. 'Dorabyn—dear Dorabyn—a little patience; and—Courage! You *shall* be free. A little patience. I will set you free.'

He stooped down and kissed her bowed head. Then without a word more he walked out of the room.

Had Lady Osterley looked up she would have been struck with the resemblance of Gilbert Maryon to the gallant youth Perseus when he started off on that adventure of his,

the rescue of Andromeda. She might, perhaps, have reflected, at the same time, that there was but one way, in both cases, by which that freedom was to be effected. Only one way. But this she did not, at the time, understand.

It was with somewhat lightened heart—did Gilbert ever fail?—that Dorabyn packed up her things, and, with her maid, her nurse and her boy, went abroad—to join, they said, her interesting husband.

* * * * *

Extract from the *Morning Post*:—

'The circumstances which have caused the resignation of Sir Charles Osterley are still partly unexplained. It appears that he is not acting by the advice of the learned practitioner who has the care of his household, either in town or the country, nor does that gentleman know anything of the case. He has never been consulted by Sir Charles, who, according to those who knew him, always seemed to enjoy the best of health.

The fact, however, remains that Sir Charles has been ordered abroad immediately: it is now certain that he was suddenly taken ill while on a visit: the case was so urgent that on a partial recovery he was hurried away under charge of a medical man without even going home; nor did her Ladyship, who was at the time out of London, know what had happened till he was gone. The shock proved almost too much for her. She is quite unable to see anyone. It is understood that she will at once join him. Sir Charles is reported to have shown some signs of improvement, but very little hope is entertained of a speedy or a permanent recovery. His physicians have not thought fit to inform the world as to the precise nature of the attack; but the rumour is persistent as to disorder of the brain. We fear that Sir Charles Osterley is lost to politics and to the House of Commons. Meanwhile, we believe that a house has been taken for him in the South of France. We venture, as political enemies, to hope that the time will come when we may again measure swords with an antagonist so worthy—so courteous—and so honourable.'

BOOK I.

THE HOUSE OF MEDITATION

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER.

'You desire, you say, to stay with us,' said the Master. 'Are you merely anxious to study our Community? You can only stay with us in obedience to our common Rule. Do you understand what that is?'

'Not very well.'

The new comer, or novice, was none other than Gilbert, and the Community was seised or possessed of a house and land in the State of New York.

'Why do you come here, young man? Are you disappointed with Outside? We have such among us who come, bruised and

broken, to find, if they can, peace and calm. Have you, perhaps, committed some crime? We have some who come to us, thus disgraced, to recover self-respect beneath this roof. Do you come in the pay of some newspaper, to pry into our lives and make "copy" out of things sacred to us? Some do that, also, pretending other reasons.'

'It is not for any such reason that I come here. I am neither disappointed in ambition, for I have none; nor am I a criminal; nor am I a journalist. I would stay here for a while: receive me as a paying boarder if you will.'

'I would rather that you came for Elevation. It is for Elevation that the Community exists. It is for Elevation that we have left Outside. Well, you may stay with us; but if you stay you must work like us for your living: we take no money. You look like an honest man. Stay as long as you please on that condition. You will find refreshment

for your soul in our simple life if you choose to take it. Perhaps you will remain with us altogether if you lose the recollection of Outside.'

'By "Outside" you mean, I take it, the world? Well, I thank you for your permission. I will obey your Rule of Work, and I will stay.'

The place was a large and very ugly hall, built of wood, bare and plain, with not the least attempt at decoration. The roof was open, showing the rafters; the walls were painted a bright yellow; there were three large square windows on each side. These windows were provided with green blinds as a protection against the sun; the blinds were partly drawn down. Along one end stood a low platform raised about twelve inches; a pianoforte stood in the corner of the platform. The body of the room was occupied by three parallel rows of narrow tables, along which were common wooden benches; the tables

were bare; the room was empty. This was the refectory, the common room, the calefactory, the chapter-house, the cloister, all in one, of the Community.

The Master sat at the end of the middle table in an armchair: he was the only member of the Society who was allowed a chair; the new comer stood before him looking, it must be confessed, ill at ease, on account of a certain difficulty in explaining his motives for craving admission.

The Master was an old man, probably past seventy years, but still tall and erect. His long white hair hung down upon his shoulders, and his long white beard flowed over his chest. In appearance he was truly patriarchal. His face was handsome still; his features not yet, despite his age, exaggerated by the graving tool of time: it was like the face that they used to show in the so-called spirit photographs, which always represented a long face, rather a handsome face, yet a

weak face, a conventional face, supposed by believers to represent great possibilities of intellect: a high square forehead, straight eyebrows, a long straight nose and an air of self-satisfaction. The Master's eyes, however, were his most remarkable feature: they were large and limpid, of a soft dark blue; they were full of light; sometimes the light was soft and steady, kindly and benevolent; sometimes it glowed and burned like a flame: it waxed and waned according to his mood. They were the eyes of the Prophet—Mohammed himself, I am sure, had such eyes—though his were black and Perhaps almond shaped. They were also the eyes of the Visionary, the Crank, who thinks himself entrusted with a message never before delivered to an expectant world.

'Whatever your motive,' the Master went on, 'whatever your history, you are welcome. Here you will receive the Discipline of Labour, the Discipline of Silence, the Disci-

pline of the Simple Life. Here you will be freed from care, from ambition, from jealousy, envy, strife: all that stands between yourself and the Higher Life shall fall away and vanish.'

Gilbert opened his lips as if he would like to inquire further into the Higher Life, but changed his mind.

'What other rules are there,' he asked, 'besides the Rule of Work?'

'There are no vows of admission. If you desire to go, you can go. Some have grown tired of our discipline, or they have longed again for the outer world, and so have left us. As for our rules, they are only such as are necessary in a Community; designed for order and for the carrying out of our principles. Take down that card' (he pointed to a large card hanging on the wall). Gilbert obeyed, and read the rules.

'5.30, Rise and dress; 6 to 8, Fatigue; 8, Restoration; 9—12.30, Fatigue; 1, Res-

toration; Afternoon, Rest and Recreation; 6, Restoration; 7, Meditation; 9, Repose.

'Fatigue? Restoration?' asked Gilbert.

'Fatigue is work, which is necessary for the health of the body. Restoration is food. Outside, it is called breakfast, dinner, or supper.'

'Is this all the Rule?'

'This,' said the Master, 'is our life: we work together; we take Restoration together; we take Recreation as we choose; we meditate.'

'You meditate?'

'Meditation, of which you know nothing as yet, is the handmaid of the Higher Life. Meditation has for ages past formed a part of the Higher Life among the Orientals. It is our especial service to the Western world that we have restored the Rite of Meditation. You do not yet, of course—how should you?—understand what this means. Young man, if you stay here, like the rest of us you

will presently find that our evening Meditation crowns the day and glorifies it. Wait: wait till you, too, can fall into Meditation when you please. To return. There are no vows, yet we must obey each other; we live in common, yet there is no need to share our property, because we want no property: most of us have none. I do not ask you whether you are rich or poor; we live by our labour: rich or poor, you must live by your labour; rich or poor, you will live with us, fare as we fare, dress as we dress; give to all and receive from all.'

Said the novice tentatively, 'It is your scheme that each should work for the other; give to him, and receive from him?'

'Remember that man is always alone, although with a companion at his side,' continued the Master, not replying. 'Every individual soul is in space, alone, with nothing but itself, rising higher or sinking lower. The loneliness of the soul demands frequent Medi-

tation : that means absolute absorption ; but for purposes of work, or even of Recreation, we want association ; so we live together. We do not encourage, at any time, not even in the hours of Recreation, idle talk ; and we do not encourage too much interest in our work—that is to say, we must not make work the chief subject of our thoughts. Work must be a servant, not a master. Many of us, I have found, are hindered by their devotion to work, especially when it is artistic work. I teach that work once done should be put away and forgotten.'

'I suppose,' said the inquirer, 'reading and writing belong to the afternoon ?'

'No. We never read at all. We have no books. We have been uplifted into the understanding that all reading is foolishness. What should we read ? History ? What is it but a record of man's iniquities and cruelties ? Science ? It is the mind groping after things which, when they are discovered,

are made the engines of more iniquities. Man is not one whit the better for any discovery of science. Poetry? It is at best a quickener of emotion—some Communities use it in the singing of hymns. At its best it may help to Elevation; at its worst it fills the soul with damnable witcheries. Novels? They are for the most part idolatrous offerings to Love, of whom they make a god—yea, and far above all other gods. With us Love takes the place which nature intended for it, and no more. What else should we read? There is Theology. It is the worship of the Word. We want no Theology here. Or there is Philosophy. We have already all we want.'

'How can one live without reading? It is like breathing: one *must* read.'

The Master laid a hand on the visitor's arm. 'You are new among us,' he said. 'You bring with you the habits of the world. In order to calm your ever-present disease of

restlessness you must be for ever reading or writing when you are not talking. You begin by thirsting after books as a drunkard thirsts after strong drink. Your restlessness demands the usual sedative. Presently, if you stay here long enough, the disease will vanish; you will gradually become, like myself, absolutely calm.' His eyes began to be filled with light; his rich, persuasive voice began to swell like an organ, crescendo. 'Your mind will float like a vessel on a calm sea; you will altogether forget Outside; you will soar upwards, free from earthly ambitions, free from human passions; you will have no hopes, no fears, and no attachments to this earth; one by one the ropes will break which now connect you with Outside. To you, as it has long been to me, this House will become the whole universe. To you, as to me, the unhappy beings who struggle and suffer Outside will cease to exist. But you must first forget the Past.'

'But this Meditation?' he asked.

'The power of abstraction does not arrive all at once, or readily. But there are helps. Some of the younger members dance. You look astonished? Dancing has always proved a stimulus to Meditation. For myself, I know not by experience how dancing affects one.'

'In the chapel?'

'We have no chapel; we have no collective prayers, praise, singing or preaching. We do not keep any days, seasons, feasts or fasts. Remember that our Rule is no new thing. We have been here twenty years. It has proved salutary to many. Doubt not that it will give you the peace and calm which perhaps you want.'

'Peace and calm,' the visitor repeated, with doubt or misgiving in his eye. He had not come to this place in search of either.

'In our Community,' continued the Master, 'there is no working for private profit, no desire for gain; there are no offices to be

filled, no ambitions to be gratified. Think. With the abolition of wealth and ambition vanish half the temptations of the world. With anxiety about the future, with the fear of want, vanish half the hindrances of life. And then there is the passion of love.'

'Of love,' repeated the listener.

'Think of the happiness of living without love.'

'Ah!' said the novice, but doubtfully.

'We do not advocate that exclusive friendship called love; each soul should feel that it stands alone; we do not foster the passion of love in this house; single attachments we discountenance: yet if man or woman wish to marry, we suffer it, but after warnings. With the greater part nothing binds a man to the earth more than the love of wife and children. Here, at least, you will be spared the temptation that assails the young continually Outside. But you must first forget the Past.'

Gilbert sat down on the bench opposite to the Master. 'You are,' he said, 'more serious than I understood. I thought that this was a Community principally for the purpose of following the common life—a kind of co-operative brotherhood.'

'To Outside it is little more. To us—how much more! My son, you are, as yet, perfectly ignorant. But fear not: you will learn. And first, you will have to learn the elementary lesson, that there is nothing in the whole world to desire—nothing worthy of any man's efforts—except Elevation.'

He rose—a tall and stately figure—and, as he stood over his disciple, Authority fell upon his face and upon his figure and upon his garments. As much Authority wrapped him round as if he had been in lawn sleeves and silk instead of an old tweed jacket and a flannel shirt. And his dark blue eyes kindled, and his voice rose.

'We have been created—we know not

when. Man, who will have no ending, never had a beginning. Let me speak to you a little. I am old, and I have meditated much; I know a great deal that you cannot know, and many things that I cannot explain to you—you would not understand.'

His voice was full and musical; if it rose but a little it became sonorous; if it fell it was like the rolling of an organ softly played. Never had Gilbert heard so wonderful a voice. It held him—just as the music of an organ will seize and hold the soul and sway it this way and that as the musician wills. The words that he spoke, as you read them on this cold printed page, mean little. As they were spoken they were words which the soul could not choose but receive—words not to be questioned; words of new wisdom; a new revelation.

'We pass from life to life,' he went on; 'from age to age, from æon to æon, through

all the countless years. We never die; we cannot die; death is but a short sleep—there is no time in death—and birth is but a renewal of the former life; through all the births man's soul mounts—mounts—mounts; or falls—falls—falls. Oh! We who stand upon the higher levels, where you will soon join us—we can look around and behold heights invisible to those below; nay, we can even look above—through the veil—beyond the veil, and have glimpses, and see visions. How can I tell you what we see? How can I express the things which the mind of man cannot conceive nor his words paint? How can I repeat the things that no voices say to us?' His eyes suddenly flamed—they became balls of fire—he gazed outwards as one who hath a vision. 'Voices invite us, hands press ours, fingers beckon us into the next world—the next step in our ascent. Believe me, it will be a far, far nobler, a far, far lovelier world, than this; everything that we have

here we shall have there, but far, far more perfect. For even in the highest heaven itself the things will be those that we have here, but made perfect inconceivably. There are others in this house beside myself to whom the voices come ; these are those who lead the perfect life. Yet this next world itself is but a stepping-stone to the next. Oh, happy, happy brother!' he took the novice by the hand, 'you have left Outside. Do not seek to go back to it ; find peace and rest amongst us.'

The voice, the eyes of the man moved Gilbert more than the words. His brain reeled ; he would have lost command of himself, but for a thought which returned to him—the disturbing thought which stood between his soul and the influence of this magnetic voice—he remembered the reason why he found himself in that house.

The words, to repeat, mean little. It would be easy to scoff at them : one might

ask where the speaker found all this wonderful knowledge; but the words were spoken with so much authority, with a voice so rich and sonorous, with such magnetism in his eyes, that the newly-arrived brother, who expected nothing but a commonplace religious quackery, was moved to the depths. Yet he was a man of West-End London, a man of the world, a man of society.

The preacher ceased; he sat down; the Authority went out of his face; the light went out of his eyes; he was again a clean, nice-looking old man, with white hair and dark blue eyes—a gentle-looking person, probably a favourite with old ladies at the tea-table—dressed in a rather shabby tweed jacket, with a black felt hat on the bench beside him. Then he spoke in quite a different voice:

'You come to us, Gilbert Maryon, for some reason or other—I know not what; but I perceive clearly that it is not the desire of

the Higher Life. Nor is it the desire to escape the consequences of crime—a thing which has brought us pretended converts. I perceive also that you are an Englishman, apparently of better station than many that you will find here; you are further, as is apparent from your manner, one of education and refinement. You will find some things among us that you will not understand, or perhaps approve: do not mock at these things, even in your heart; do not laugh at us, even secretly. Say to yourself, "Such-and-such are their ideals; in some unknown way these things are found helpful by the Community; I will wait." Promise me so much, Gilbert.'

'I will promise so much, at least. You have greatly moved me. I expected nothing like it——'

'Enough. Now, it is already past five o'clock. I will send one of your new sisters to take you round the house and show you

the workshops. You will choose your own work. And your sister will show you your room. And, my brother, you must resolve at once, and from this moment, to forget the Past.'

CHAPTER II.

THE MONASTIC HABIT.

GILBERT sat down and waited while the Master went off to find that sister. 'This,' he said, 'is a very remarkable Community; I must see something of it before I complete the job. If the Prophet knew why I have come here!' He felt horribly guilty, because, of a truth, it was not at all the kind of job to suit the House. Yet it had to be done somehow, and that speedily. 'I suppose he won't know me; if he does, I must settle it at once. I don't think he knows me; I have never seen him, and I don't think he has ever seen me. Yet he is here

and I am here, and Dorabyn must be set free.' He took a letter from his pocket-book and opened it. 'There can be no mistake possible; he put the fact into words plain and clear; the information is certain—he is in this house. A pretty reason, truly, I could give the Prophet for joining this Community of men who are rising to other worlds!'

He read the letter over again, for the tenth time. It was from a private detective of New York.

'I am pleased to report that I have at last discovered the hiding-place of the man you want. He has changed his name so often and has worked with so much secrecy that it has been extremely difficult to trace him; I have only done so by following up from place to place the mischief which he and his company have caused.

'What I have learned is this. He came over in April, 1893, under the name of Charles Lee. Whether this was an assumed name or

a true name I cannot tell; nor have any inquiries in Scotland Yard been answered satisfactorily. He does not seem known to the London detectives. He went first of all to a French hotel of doubtful reputation; and he was received in certain gambling clubs, where he seems to have lost a considerable sum of money in a very short time. Presumably it was all he had, because he was next seen in the streets of New York in a destitute and miserable condition. This was changed, however, before long; for we find him again in a first-class hotel, living as an English gentleman of fortune. The explanation is simple: the men among whom he lost his money—a ring of sharpers—wanted a confederate whose manners and appearance would command more confidence than their own; he joined them. He has been with them ever since. They travel about—but singly, not together: they never own each other. They go from town to town; sometimes they pretend to rook the rich Englishman, in order to disarm suspicion. Always the rich Englishman is drawn into the gambling den, and loses

money ; then the men of the place have a turn or two with him, and the luck miraculously turns. They appear to have done very well. At Chicago, in the summer of 1893, they made quite a pile, and lived on the best of everything all the time. They added to their gaming certain operations of a "long-firm" character. What broke up the gang was the death of a young Mexican at one of their haunts. I do not know the particulars. Mr. "Charles Lee" was present, certainly ; but very little is said about it, and nothing gets into the papers. The ring is broken up and dispersed ; the police are picking up the members here and there. As for your man, he has found a hiding-place where they are least likely to look for him. It is in a quiet Community of Cranks—one of the many Communities which have been tried in this country. They admit anybody who conforms to their Rule ; they are only a small body ; they are said to be quite harmless ; they live about four miles from the city of Aldermanbury, N.Y. There your man is at present hiding ; he will stay there, if he is wise, a long time.

'I learn further from my informant, who was one of them, that "Charles Lee" is the ablest as well as the best-mannered man in the gang. It is he who devises new combinations and novel methods. He is a devil for ingenuity and ruthlessness. His only weakness is that he goes mad over gambling. They let him play as much as he pleases, but he is always made to play with one of the gang. For the rest, he is full of resource and always devising new schemes—a most dangerous man. He would do well, I repeat, to stay where he is as long as he can.'

'Well,' said Gilbert, folding up the letter, 'I am here, and he is here. Dorabyn, the day of your redemption draweth nigh. He is here, and I am here, and—he shall fight me. It shall be a duel to the death.'

He sighed with relief; he replaced the pocket-book, and he returned to the consideration of the House.

'One expected,' if we may put his thoughts into words, 'to find on the religious side of

the Fraternity a smug and self-satisfied sectarianism. One thought the Master would have been something like a Primitive Methodist minister, but more narrow and more cock-sure; instead of that, one finds a Prophet with eloquence, persuasion and nobility. He has interesting views; he has constructed an entirely new scheme of the universe and of humanity; and he apparently enjoys a private revelation of his own. On the practical side one expected there would be futility and pretence: on the other hand, there is solid work. What the Master actually teaches in matters of doctrine will be ascertained in good time; at present it appears that they have no creed, no articles, no chapel, no services. It is a religious house without any religion! As for myself, I am ashamed, thinking of my mission. The reason of my coming is not in the least the elevation of my soul, as the Master hopes. It is—what? Justice or revenge? I know

not. As for the Rule, there is none; or, if any, it is comprised in the simple law, "Thou shalt do no reading." No chapel, no religious services, no sacred books, no preaching—a religion, therefore, without doctrines; everybody to believe what he pleases; no priest, no mysteries, no——'

At this point Gilbert's speculations were disturbed. The disturbing influence was a girl, who came into the hall with the evident intention of speaking with him. She was quite young — not more than nineteen or twenty; she was bare-headed, but carried her hat in her hand. Gilbert sprang to his feet. Good heavens! was this a sister of the Community? Were all the sisters like this girl? Was he, in sober reality, in a paradise peopled with veritable angels? Because, you see, this girl possessed a face which few artists could ever imagine, invent, or find—a face of such purity, holiness and unworldly beauty, with so much tranquillity

in it, so much virginal sweetness in it, so much innocence in it, that she might have been standing behind the Master and whispering in his ear while he discoursed upon the voices and the unspeakable glories of his vision. Such a face as Dante saw in Beatrice, such a face as Petrarch saw in Laura—such a face was that which met this new brother of the House. The features of her face were perfectly regular; her head was shapely, her hair fine—and it would have been abundant too, had it not been ruthlessly cut short just below the ears; her eyes were gray, touched with blue, and very, very serious: her face was composed and grave; her mouth was set. It was an oval face, a Greek face, with a somewhat low forehead. Her stature was tall, and her figure slight. This was a girl born in the House: she had never been outside it; she had never even spoken with anyone out of the Community; she had never heard anyone laugh; she

knew nothing of the outer world, except that it mostly belonged to quite the lower levels; she had an unbounded belief in the Master and in the Community; and she lived for the greater part of her time in a world of dreams.

'Brother Gilbert,' she began with a pretty, maidenly blush, 'the Master has sent me to look after you.'

'It is very kind of the Master—and of you.'

'I generally receive new comers to the House. My name is Cicely.'

'My Sister Cicely,' he repeated gravely. 'There is no tie more delightful than the brotherly and sisterly bond. I hope I shall prove worthy of it.'

The appearance of this interesting maiden was another reason why the completion of the business in hand must be made to wait for a day or two.

'You are an Englishman, the Master said. My father was English, too. I hope you

will stay. I think you look as if you could rise. Some who come here go away again very quickly.'

'Oh!' the latest comer repeated. 'It is good of you to say so. They go away. Why do they come? Why does anybody come here?'

'I don't know. Sometimes they come crying and weeping—they are the sisters; they cry for the wickedness they have left Outside. Sometimes they are bad people, who come here to repent. You will find it a beautiful place for repentance—but I hope, Brother Gilbert, that you are not that kind. We have had burglars here.'

'I have not done anything, Cicely, I assure you—not even a burglary.'

'Then you begin at once, like me, on the higher levels. I have never been in the world at all, so that I never had the opportunity of doing anything. Otherwise I might have been a burglar too.'

'Very likely indeed,' Gilbert replied, with a little laugh. 'At least——' he remembered the very serious views of the Prophet, and was ashamed of laughing. 'That is—I mean—well—I shall be pleased to fall in with the customs of the House. And you can tell me who the members are—all of them?'

'Yes. But it is nearly half-past five: Restoration bell will soon ring, and you are not even dressed yet.'

He was surprised at this objection. He had not expected such refinements in a monastery.

'Do you dress for Restoration here, then?'

She looked puzzled. 'I mean,' she said, 'that you have not yet put on the dress of the House.'

'Oh! but I haven't got the dress of the House.'

'I will show you presently where you can get one.'

'Oh!' He now observed that she wore a curious kind of uniform. 'Is that the sisters' dress?'

'Of course it is.'

She was such a very lovely, dainty and ethereal maiden that she even rose superior to her costume. The full dreadfulness of the dress did not burst upon him all at once —such a thing requires time; it grows upon one; its ugliness cannot be realized by the human imagination at the first aspect. There are enormities in ugliness as there are enormities in figures, fortunes, distances, which have to be slowly approached and gradually appreciated. The sisters of that Community were clad in a uniform profoundly ugly. I cannot believe that the Master, black and dark as is that prophetic soul as regards art and æsthetics, could possibly have invented it. Respect for the memory of his mother would have forbidden him to invent such a dress. Alas! even

respect for their mothers could not restrain the sisters of the Community from inventing this dress. And they designed it, treacherously and wickedly, of set purpose to make (but no one can) a lovely woman unattractive; and (which any one can do) a plain woman hideous.

One is ashamed to write down the details. However, if it must be done—the dress consisted of a bodice, made of some gray stuff, and of a short, scanty skirt of the same material; the skirt reached just below the knee, and then there became visible loose trousers, also of the same material and also short. Stout boots completed the costume at that end. At the other the hair was cut below the ears and pulled back. There was no bright ribbon either for hair or for throat. One small, very small concession to feminine vanity was, that the sisters were allowed to wear a brooch and to exercise their own taste in choosing it. It is astonishing that a

brooch was allowed at all when a common safety-pin would have answered equally well. The scantiness and the brevity of the skirts forbade any sense of drapery: you cannot get folds, or curves, or any grace of falling drapery with only three feet in length to work upon.

'A truly wonderful face,' Gilbert observed. 'It must indeed be sweet not to be spoiled by such a hideous dress. Poor child!'

He shouldered his portmanteau and followed his new sister. She led him out of the hall into the grounds of the House. This monastery did not follow the usual disposition of a Benedictine house. There was in it neither cloister, nor cloister garth, nor chapel, nor scriptorium, nor misericordia, nor library, nor chapter-house. There was no beauty in the buildings; no picturesque effect in the grouping or in the gardens. The House consisted simply of the central hall, with a gaunt, wooden erection of four

stories at either end. These contained the sleeping-rooms for the members; those of the women at one end, and those of the men at the other. Nothing could be simpler than these buildings, or more hideous than the square structures of wood painted a dull yellow; there were no creepers over the wall to relieve the monotony; there were no flower-beds along the wall; the houses rose gaunt and hideous out of the bare ground. Along the side of the hall, which had a porch in the middle, ran a deep verandah, and at the back of the verandah was a low bench with a sloping back.

In front of the House stretched a broad lawn, not too carefully kept, but still a pleasant breadth of green; a few flower-beds were set at the edges; a shrubbery or two at the corners; the flowers were chiefly roses and lilies—in the month of May both roses and lilies are beginning to put forth blossoms. On the grass a small party were playing

croquet, but languidly, perhaps because the sun, now sloping westward, was still hot; perhaps because they took little interest in the game. Along the back of the lawn was planted a fine avenue of shade trees, limes and elms; under these trees were benches. On one side of the lawn was a vast garden full of flowers, acres of flowers; not planted singly, as in a private garden, where each rose bush is an object of solicitude, but in patches and squares: here a square of roses and there a square of lilies, and so forth—evidently a flower farm. On the other side stretched an equally large garden planted with strawberries, raspberries, and all berries that grow for the delectation of man, with the vegetables which correct his carnivoracity and keep him gentle—evidently a kitchen garden.

All this, with the orchard, the pasture-land, the coppice for firewood, the cornfield and the rest of the fraternity farm, Gilbert discovered

gradually, not at that first view from the porch.

On the other side of the House were the offices—kitchen, scullery, pantry, dairy—a huge place; evidently a dairy which made great quantities of butter and cheese and cream; some women were at work still, for one cannot clear off dairy work every day by twelve o'clock; there were also the farm buildings—barns, yards, sheds, implements and machines; pig-sties, cattle-pens, turkeys, geese, ducks, and fowls; beehives, ponds, ricks—everything. And all well kept and in order. The Community knew how to farm, if they could do nothing more. One can farm, we may remark, without books.

Besides the farm there were workshops. These were now closed. Gilbert looked into the windows. There was the carpenter's shop, the blacksmith's shop, the shoemaker's shop, and so on. The Community, there-

fore, made everything that they could for themselves.

He remembered the words of the sage: 'We must not think too much about work. It is man's servant, not his master.' It was the true monkish idea of work. One must labour, not to produce fine work, artistic work, not as if good work is an end in itself, but in order to subjugate the body. For this purpose, a walk over a ploughed field, an hour's exercise with a spade, the digging of a hole in order to fill it up again, is sufficient and laudable. But since people must eat, why not utilize the labour and make it productive? Nothing, therefore, can be more highly recommended for monastic purposes than a farm, an orchard, and a garden. In the Carthusian Order every monk had his own garden to himself. The Master knew what was wanted when he provided the House with a farm.

The place was very quiet. There was

no sound of voices, yet women were at work in the kitchens and in the dairy. Did even the women refrain from conversation?

'This,' said Cicely, opening the door of a large wooden barn, 'is the wardrobe. If you will go in there, you will find all you want. I will wait for you.'

'Strange,' Gilbert thought, as he looked round the shelves in the wardrobe. 'This is the practical side of the monastery. Even a monk must have a place to keep his things. Did the Eremites in the desert have shelves where they kept their Eremitic things? Was St. Francis particular about the folds of his gray gown? Was there a Monmouth Street in the Solitudes?'

He reserved further speculation on this point, and proceeded to select the robes of the Order. In a few minutes he emerged in his new costume, which was simply a suit of gray tweed, useful for working purposes.

He carried the habits of Outside rolled up in his portmanteau.

'Now,' he said, 'I have taken the vows, and been received, and I wear the robes. They are convenient, if not beautiful. What next, O my sister?'

'Now I will take you to your room.'

She led the way to the men's wing, and ran lightly up the stairs to the top of the house. There was a narrow passage on each floor, with doors standing open on either side. On the third floor the girl walked along the passage to the very end. 'Number forty-one,' she said: 'that is your room. Do not forget the number.'

Gilbert found himself in a little room about ten feet square. It was simply furnished with a small camp-bed, one chair, a washing-basin with taps for letting in and letting off water, a towel, two or three pegs on the wall for hanging clothes, and a small cupboard with shelves. No carpet; no curtain; no blind;

a single gas-jet without any glass. The lower part of the window was painted over, so as to avoid the necessity of a blind. There was no lock or bolt on the door. On the wall was hanging a card with the words, 'Make your bed. Sweep out your room. Brush your boots.'

'Humph!' he said; 'it is small—it is like a cell; yet a monk has no reason to complain of his cell.'

'They are all exactly alike,' said the girl. 'Ours in the other building are just the same. What can one want more?'

'Am I to give up my money and watch and things?'

'Give them up? Why? They are of no use to you or to anybody else. You may throw them away if you like. We have no use for money among ourselves.'

'I think I will keep them. No one knows of what use they may be some time or other.'

She began to turn over the things which

he laid on the chest of drawers. 'Let me look at them. What a pretty ring! Is that your coat-of-arms? I have my father's coat-of-arms, and a box full of rings and jewels and things that belonged to my mother. I keep them all because they were hers. Some of us have things which we keep—some have nothing. We do as we please. Some of them say that rings are a hindrance, but I don't think they matter.'

'Not much, especially if you never wear them.'

'The brother who sleeps next to you keeps things in a box. He is a bad man.'

She spoke like a child who reckons up a king in history as a bad king or a good king, without further discrimination. To the child, as to Cicely, all wickedness is alike.

'You look like a good man,' she said. 'If you are, perhaps we may meet in the Hour of Meditation. We often talk of meeting each other in upward flights; but I have

never met with anybody yet except my dead parents.'

Gilbert listened, and marvelled. The girl gazed upon him, not boldly, but with clear and candid look. 'You are not like any of them,' she said. 'Your eyes are different. You look good. I like your face and your voice. But there is a burden upon your soul. I do not know what kind of burden. Shake it off, Brother Gilbert, and try to meet me in the Hour of Meditation.' She laid her hand upon his arm. 'Shake it off, I pray you. Leave it behind you. Forget the Past—forget the Past!'

Always the same refrain. He must forget the Past. How can a man forget the Past?

He evaded the point. There was a burden. Most likely the girl thought he had 'done something' Outside. The burden he bore was not, however, that which she meant or could understand. He returned to the other

man, the bad man, the man of the next room.

'About the man who is bad. How do you know that he is bad?'

'One can tell by looking at him. Besides, he does not try to improve. He lives in the Past always. We have no Past. It is all present and future. Presently he will grow tired of us and go away.'

'What is the name of this bad man?'

'Charles—Brother Charles. He is an Englishman, like you.'

'Charles! Charles! Is his name Charles Lee?'

'I do not know anybody's name. I dare say he had some name Outside. He has only been here a few weeks.'

'Next to me! He sleeps next to me! It must be the man.'

'What do you mean?' For he changed colour, and showed signs of excitement.

'Nothing. I may, perhaps—who knows?

—be the humble means of making this bad man feel sorry for certain things. He sleeps next to me.' Gilbert looked into the next cell. It was exactly like his own ; a portmanteau, also like his own, stood in one corner. 'Good!' he said : 'we shall perhaps find opportunities of conversation.'

CHAPTER III.

RESTORATION AND MEDITATION.

At that moment Cling—clang—clash—broke out the most discordant bell possible to imagine—certainly the worst bell even in this wide world of bad bells.

'Good Lord!' cried Gilbert, 'what instrument of torture is that?'

'It is our bell. It rings for Restoration—at eight o'clock and one o'clock and six o'clock. And it wakes us up in the morning.'

'I can well believe that,' said Gilbert. 'This bell would wake the Seven Sleepers.'

'Let us go in to Restoration, then. Your

place will be next to me—I have you on one side, and the other Englishman——'

'Him of the badness?'

'Yes—on the other side.'

'Oh, I shall have to meet him—sit opposite to him at Restoration—three times a day, shall I? Curious! For how many days, I wonder!'

The three long, narrow tables, which were the principal furniture of the hall, were now spread with tablecloths, not too white, for it was near the end of the week, and laid with dishes and plates. The Fraternity—brethren and sisters—were all assembled in their places; they filled the benches, and were in number about a hundred and twenty. There was no grace or formality of any kind—never was a monastery more free from rules, not even the famous House of Thelema, on the Loire. Each one as he arrived took his seat, seized knife and fork, and without further ceremony began to eat and to drink

with zeal. Already, though the bell had only just stopped, there was audible from all parts of the hall the musical tinkle of knife and plate.

On the platform one of the Community played the piano. By his long fair hair, by his blue eyes, by his beard, by his glasses, he proclaimed himself a German. He played extremely well; soft, pleasant music, that dropped upon the ears with soothing, not stimulating, effect; he improvised, he played continuously: it was the pleasing custom of the House to take this soft music with evening Restoration, by way of preparing the mind for what followed after.

'This is my place,' said the girl, taking the end of the middle table nearest the door. 'Sit here, Brother Gilbert, on my right. This is Brother Charles, the only other Englishman in the House.'

Gilbert started. He ought to have known what to expect; but the thing startled him.

Imagine, in a Community full of country people, rustics, sitting down to a rude and coarse supper of pork and steaks and other such preparations, the arrival of a guest with the manners and appearance of an aristocrat of the finest and most finished and most exclusive. In such a case one feels that it is not always dress that makes the man. This man — this Brother Charles — was dressed like all the rest in the gray tweed: the difference lay in his face and his manner. All the West End was recalled by that face and by that manner.

He came in last of all: he looked round the room coldly, as a French noble would look upon the *canaille*, as if they did not exist; his appearance, his manner, were those of the ideal duke; he bowed slightly to Cicely, as one would acknowledge the presence of a woman who is just not one's servant; and he stared in the customary insolently fixed gaze upon the new-comer.

Then he took his seat and contemplated the steak in front of him doubtfully.

'Brother Charles,' said Cicely, 'this is Brother Gilbert—our new-comer.'

The man bowed slightly, but said nothing. Gilbert changed colour. The time had come, then, and the man. Before him sat the man whom he had hunted for two years. There he was—Sir Charles Osterley, Baronet, late M.P., and sometime Under-Secretary of State for the Fisheries. You have heard that Gilbert had never met the man before he had left the world in order to join the devil. But he had heard of him, and he knew the photographs and portraits of him: a dark man, tall, slight and spare of figure, pale, clean shaven, careful of dress, reserved in manner, said to be serious in his views. The man before him was tall, slight and spare, clean shaven, pale, looking serious and self-contained: so far there was no change in him. As Gilbert looked, however,

Brother Charles lifted his face. Then the swift, suspicious glance showed that there had been change: it was the look of the hunted man, hiding in this home of Crankery, where no one was likely to find him, asking himself with sinking heart what a second Englishman wanted in the place. It was also the look of the hawk, relentless. With the prophetic power which often accompanies a full knowledge of the circumstances, Gilbert understood that searching look of inquiry and suspicion; and the hunted look; and the look of the hawk. 'They are fine eyes,' he thought, 'keen eyes: they should be beautiful eyes; but . . .' He felt his breast pocket. 'I have your portrait in my pocket, Sir Charles Osterley,' but this he did not say. 'When it was taken you were supposed to be a gentleman of England. Now you are undoubtedly a child of the Devil.'

Then Brother Charles spoke, courteously

this time, but coldly. He had quite preserved the old manner. In fact, it was his principal asset.

'This is an agreeable surprise,' he said. 'One does not often meet with a countryman in so secluded a spot. Have you been long in the States?'

'About two years,' Gilbert replied.

'Ah! I have been here so long that I have left off counting the years: my name is Lee—Charles Lee.'

'Mine is Maryon—Gilbert Maryon.'

'Maryon,' the other repeated—'Maryon. I have heard the name. You have the appearance of a gentleman.'

A dubious compliment. Perhaps he meant to be insolent.

'Why should I not have that appearance? You yourself. . . .' But remembering things, he did not finish the sentence.

'I mean only that it is unusual in this House, so far as I have discovered.' He

spoke coldly, with the manner of one who converses with a secretary—that is, he spoke as a master.

'My father was an English gentleman,' said Cicely, 'but we must not talk of such distinctions in this House. Here we are all alike; we have nothing to think about but Elevation. Otherwise we have no business here.'

She looked from one Englishman to the other, comparing and wondering. One, she knew, was a bad man: the other, she was certain, was a good man. Yet they were both gentlemen.

Brother Charles politely bowed his head, with just the least, almost imperceptible, sneer upon his lips, such as any courtly devil might show on being invited to Elevation. Then he lapsed into silence.

The supper was plentiful, but coarse; the dishes illustrated the observation of Brother Charles as to the rank and station of the

Brotherhood. There was pork and beans—a favourite dish: Gilbert presently remarked that it was exhibited at every-day Restoration, morning, noon, and evening; there were steaks, but not exactly the kind of steak which one can command in the City of London: a tougher and thinner variety of the delicacy; and there was pie—pie open, pie cross, and pie covered—that is to say, pie in all its branches; an abundance of pie. Everything was put on the table at the same time, and there were no waiters. Between the dishes there were teapots and coffee-pots and jugs of iced water. It never entered into the head of any brother or sister that one could possibly hanker after whisky: of wine, probably not one in the room, except the two Englishmen, had ever heard.

Gilbert looked round the hall, studying the faces of his new friends. Alas! he could not disguise from himself the fact that they looked common—very common. They were all feed-

ing like cattle ; with avidity, seriousness, and silence. There was neither speech nor language among them. But, he reflected, if you were to take all the members of the House of Lords and dress them in a uniform of gray tweed, and then attire their consorts and their sisters and their daughters in the most hideous costume ever designed, and, lastly, cut off the feminine locks, you would produce a common appearance, even among those exalted beings. But lofty thoughts, sacred thoughts, Meditation on things too high for speech, ought to produce their effect upon the face : they should stamp it, they should refine it, however rugged may be the first modelling. Except on the faces of the Master and of Cicely, he could see no sign of any such refining : the faces were common —mostly vacuous, dull and common. Just now, however, they were universally lit up by eagerness after food.

They had already, as has been said, begun

to break bread. Now, there is one test which never fails : it is a touchstone, it is the spear of Ithuriel. Gilbert observed by application of this test, which is that of table manners, that the Community belonged apparently, one and all, to what we call in this country quite the lower middle class.

Well, one cannot expect an ideal Community such as this to attract the rich and the luxurious. They would want such a house to be directed by an Archbishop of lenient disposition, and to contain none but themselves, with a fine cellar and good cigars. Among these people of the lower middle class there would be gifts and graces, no doubt, as yet unrevealed and unsuspected. The girl who had taken him to his room, Sister Cicely, was, he observed with satisfaction, an exception. She possessed, apparently, the refinement of a gentlewoman ; her father, she said, was an English gentleman : she knew how to sit, how to walk, how to speak, and

how to approach the necessary subject of food. Gilbert was never insensible to an interesting person of the other sex: he began to talk to her.

'Is there,' he asked, 'a rule of silence, that no one speaks?'

'No,' she replied. 'There is no rule of any kind in the House, except that we must above all things respect Meditation.'

'Come,' Gilbert objected; 'you cannot meditate while you are eating. Pork and beans cannot possibly go with Meditation'

She shook her head.

'You know nothing as yet, Brother Gilbert. You have come from a world where there is no Meditation.'

'May I talk with you, Cicely, or are you meditating?'

'You may talk with me if you like, but not so loud, so as to disturb the others; they may be composing their minds by silence after Restoration. You may go away if you like,

but if you stay here you will very soon understand that you must not talk. Nothing disturbs the mind so much.'

'I remember the name of Maryon,' Brother Charles said after a long pause. 'I have heard of people named Maryon, but at present I do not connect the name with any person or family.'

Gilbert had given his own name boldly. He thought that Dorabyn's husband must have heard of him. He forgot, however, that it was immediately after the honeymoon of a week that the future Premier had begun his depredations on his wife's property ; and that the pair had then virtually separated. Gilbert's name, in fact, had never been mentioned between them.

'I suppose,' he replied, 'that my name is known well enough among my friends. Outside my own circle I see no reason why it should be known. I have never, for instance, distinguished myself in any way. Have you ?'

The man winced visibly, and again shot a glance of suspicion across the table. In this frank-faced young Englishman he could see nothing to warrant any suspicion. Yet, what was he doing in this place?

Gilbert turned to consider his neighbour on his left. This, as he learned afterwards, was a certain Brother Silas, a young man of thirty or so. He was evidently a countryman, a rustic of the American type, which is not at all the English type; he belonged to the farming class, and was a man of Maine; his powers of working through Restoration were prodigious: he uttered no words; when he wanted anything he just reached across his neighbours and helped himself; he drank tea with his pork and beans, and coffee with his pie; his table manners wanted polish; when he desisted for a moment and raised his head Gilbert observed that his features were naturally hard, but that his soft and dreamy eyes took away the rugged

look. In the course of a day or two Gilbert learned to classify the Fraternity. There was the soft and dreamy eye which belonged to most ; there was the restless, unsatisfied eye which belonged to some ; there was the eye of sadness as for an unburied and unforgotten Past, which was also found among them ; and there was the wolfish eye, which belonged to Brother Charles and to nobody else.

Restoration ended, everyone rose—not to say grace, but to reverse himself. They now sat with their backs to the tables, and they all assumed the same position ; they folded their hands ; they inclined their heads slightly backward—a position necessary unless they wished to gaze in each other's faces ; the men stretched out their feet. Then half a dozen of the sisters, including Cicely—a duty taken in turn—carried out the dishes and cleared the tables and rolled up the tablecloths. Some of the men lit the petroleum lamps which hung against the wall. The

musician ceased and silence fell upon the place. Brother Charles leaned across the table.

'One is not obliged to stay,' he whispered. 'I always go outside when the foolishness begins. Come out and let us talk of London.'

'I shall stay here,' Gilbert replied coldly.

Brother Charles rose and went out, and came back no more. And then the Master came walking softly down the lines of white faces turned upward to the light of the lamps. He stood beside Gilbert and spoke in a kind of murmur.

'It is the hour of Meditation. It is the hour which sanctifies the day.'

In these days everybody travels; everybody has seen everything, from nautch girls to dervishes. But Gilbert had never seen, or imagined, or heard of, or read of, anything more remarkable and wonderful than the thing which followed.

The bell rang, just one note and no more,

like the last note of the Angelus ; the musician at the piano began to play again, more softly, more dreamily.

Then, suddenly, upon the faces there fell, as it were, a veil ; it wasn't really a veil, it was the sudden withdrawal from nearly every face of all the life and expression that lay in it. The life went out of it ; the face became vacuous ; it became rigid ; the people seemed all to be dead, to be suddenly killed ; their open eyes saw nothing ; through their parted lips there passed no breath.

'Good heavens!' cried the new-comer. 'What are they doing now?'

'They meditate.'

'Meditate? They are all fallen into trance!'

'You have read, doubtless, or heard, of miraculous trances and raptures of saints in days gone by. You have perhaps scoffed at them. It is the fashion of the day to disbelieve what we cannot understand. But

even the wisest man of science understands nothing; he only states a physical law and calls it a cause. Scoff no more at these stories. Here you behold a whole company of a hundred and more who can, at will, fall into this miraculous trance. There they sit, and there, unknown to each other and to you, they see visions, hear voices, and receive instruction.'

'You hear voices?' he repeated, incredulous.

'It is our miracle—our own—a special and a wonderful gift, bestowed upon this Community alone. It is impossible to doubt the blessing that rests upon us. You too will presently fall under the holy influence. As for me, I have reached to the level of the life above, the next life. I converse with the people whom I am soon to join. I see them with spiritual eyes. Is not this a great and wonderful gift? But, to obtain it, you must first forget the Past.'

'It is indeed most wonderful.' Gilbert felt

himself half ready to fall into the same trance.

The Master laid his hand upon the newly-joined brother's shoulder. 'Join us,' he said. 'Cease to think of the Past which belongs to the world and to ambition. Fix your thoughts upon the path that lies before. Forget the Past; it is full of shadows: learn the realities of life.'

So saying, he left him and walked back to his place at the head of the central table, where he occupied a wooden armchair. As he sat down, immediately there fell upon his face the white, fixed, vacuous look of trance. Gilbert looked about him. Not all the faces, he now perceived, wore this look of fixed vacuity; in a few there were signs of imperfect wakefulness. Not all of them, then, possessed this strange power completely. As for himself, Gilbert felt like a sleepy man who cannot sleep for thinking of things. He was very near unto trance. His thoughts

were wandering beyond control. He was back in his London chambers; he was listening to Dorabyn's wretched story; he was hunting down the man whom he had caught at last; he was wondering, not what he should do, but how he should do it—and when. He knew very well indeed what had to be done. He had sworn to give Dorabyn her freedom. In what way? There is but one way in such a case as this. Gilbert knew very well what had to be done. Now that the time for doing it drew near he felt no hesitations and no fears: he was no longer anxious, but he was naturally excited, and the villainous eyes of the man—the seal upon his front—only strengthened his purpose.

Such reflections, however, interfered with the conditions of mental repose necessary for trance. So, like the sleepy man who cannot sleep, he only grew more restless every moment.

He got up and walked softly along the

lines of sleepers; he peered into their faces: they moved not nor took the least notice; the open eyes did not blink though he passed his hand over them; the partly-wakeful ones only shut their eyes impatiently.

As he passed along he became aware that they all resembled each other. You know that if you regard a flock of sheep collectively you say that they are all alike; when you take them individually you find that they are all different. Yet your first impression was right, because they all have the same face with little variations. So, if a man dwells in a monastery he presently assumes the monastic face, whatever that may be. These people all had the same face, collectively. Individually they exhibited the ordinary variations: there was the oval face, the round face, the square face, and the long face; there were the faces of the horse, the lion, the snake, the fox, the hog, the crocodile and the lamb. Somehow, no doubt because

of the trance, Gilbert failed to find the spiritual face. Yet the Master, before he dropped into his rapture, had that face. The face of the Community, corresponding to the face of the flock, was, Gilbert had already observed, a common face. Now, a man may wear any expression he pleases; he may be as ugly as he pleases—no one will blame him; but he must not look common; and the collective face was undoubtedly of the common type.

The German musician went on playing; he played as if he were himself in a trance. His face, too, was fixed; he played louder and more inspiring music: a march; a war song; a hymn of triumph.

Then one of the brothers—one of those with the wakeful eyes—arose and stepped upon the platform; one of the sisters followed; then another brother and another sister, till there were ten or a dozen of them. They stood in silence; not laughing or

smiling; in awkward and clumsy attitudes. They spoke not, nor smiled; they were perfectly grave. They took places in a procession two by two, and bending forward with outstretched hands, an attitude as ungraceful as could be well imagined, they began a kind of rhythmic walk round; not that boisterous, cheerful, self-asserting walk round that used to be seen in the burlesques of thirty years ago, but a meek, shuffling, shambling tramp, whose only recommendation was that it was true to time.

'This is the exercise mentioned by the Master,' observed Gilbert. 'A man can lift his soul by means of music; a little more of that man's playing would carry me out of myself; but to tramp with heavy boots round and round a stage . . . perhaps I shall do it in a day or two.'

The music grew louder and faster; the tramp of the feet grew noisier; but the faces of those who danced or tramped remained

the same—white in the lamplight, silent, expectant. They were dancing themselves into a condition of complete trance. One by one they dropped out and fell back into their seats, and the light went out of their open eyes.

A most astonishing dance. Gilbert looked to see the performers fall into some kind of ecstasy and whirl round like the dancing dervishes whom he had seen at Damascus. No, the dance was sufficient in itself, dull and monotonous as it was. Presently the last man left off tramping round and stepped off the platform.

Then the musician changed his time. Heavens! he was playing one of Strauss's most delightful waltzes—a thing which made the senses swim, partly with the recollection of it, partly with the suggestion of it. All that love contains of joy and rapture was in that waltz. He knew it well, and the world to which it belonged came back to him with

a rush. And it seemed only natural and a thing to be expected when the girl Cicely sprang upon the platform and began to dance all by herself. Nobody saw her; nobody looked at her, except Gilbert; and of his presence she seemed unaware. She danced, being self-taught, with neither model to copy nor master to teach nor audience to applaud, a kind of skirt-dance without the long skirts. She had taken off her heavy boots, and was in slippers. The sight of her dancing was like the cool shadow of a great rock, like a long draught to a thirsty throat, like smooth water after a storm. It was a marvel and a delight to mark the exquisite grace of this girl's gestures, the free carriage of her arms, the suppleness of her limbs, the flexible movements of her figure, the ordered movement of her feet. Where had she learned it? She had that ineffable charm of the born dancer, who, with every step, seems to express some thought suggested

by the music ; she surrendered herself to the music ; she obeyed it ; she followed it.

'This,' said Gilbert, 'is the most truly wonderful thing of any. And not one turns his head to look at her!'

That, however, was not wonderful, because in this kind of trance you may fire a cannon beside the patient, or you may cut him into small pieces with blunt knives, but you will not awaken him. So none of these sleepers had the least knowledge of the music or the dancing.

Next, the one-man audience observed that this *danseuse* was dancing entirely for herself. You know the threefold smile of the professional—that on her entrance, that with which she vanishes, and the fixed smile with which she performs. Imagine a dancer without any smile at all, utterly unconscious of her audience : such was this dancer.

Suddenly she threw up her arms, and, with a cry—an exultant cry—she whirled

round with swiftly twinkling feet — faster, faster, faster.

'It's splendid!' said the audience, longing to applaud.

Then she stopped suddenly, and, lightly stepping off the stage, took her seat, and became instantly entranced. The musician stopped, and there was silence; and in this goodly company of a hundred and more this stranger was the only one not in the trance which the Master called Meditation.

'What are they thinking about?' he asked. 'They can't all hear voices and see visions. Perhaps the girl heard voices while she danced. She is a heaven-sent genius; she is inspired. With that lovely face, with that divinely-graceful step, surely, surely, if there were any voices to be heard, she would hear them. But what a dress! what a dress!'

If you come to think about it, we have, as the Master said, lost the power of Meditation.

No living European can concentrate his gaze and his thoughts upon his great toe and continue in abstracted Meditation for days or years together. Formerly we had recluses who thus meditated, lost to the outer world ; they had to, or they would have been unhappy in the long winter days and nights when no one came to see them. We had hermits, too, but they were more sociable. The Carthusian, neither hermit nor anchorite, meditated a good deal. Nowadays, however, no one meditates at all—unless it be a novelist over a plot or a mathematician over a problem. We call it Meditation when we sit with a pen in hand, or when we walk alone, or when we are reading : we fix our thoughts elsewhere, while the eye, unheeded, runs mechanically over the page. I once knew a boy who meditated much because he had to go to church much ; his Meditations began and ended with the sermon. Gilbert, however, had never in his life set himself to

meditate, and he wondered, very naturally, what the thing might mean.

All kinds of questions might be asked about this trance. Did they carry on this kind of thing every night? Did they really advance themselves, elevate their souls, in this wonderful way? Did they really get visions, hear voices, see things, while they were in trance? Would this one-man audience, without any volition on his part, become, if he stayed long enough, a performer with the rest—perhaps to tramp round with the grace and agility of a rhinoceros?

All in silence: there was no sound at all; no one coughed; no one breathed; there was no scraping of a restless foot. The rows of white faces turned up to the light of the petroleum lamps were as still and motionless as the dead—only one man of them all left alive, only one to count the dead; the place seemed a tomb. Gilbert felt as if he must

fly from it into the open air under the stars. To be sitting in the company of a hundred dead men and women, yourself alive, is terrible. Still he stayed on, looking for the return to life.

It was about seven when they 'went off.' At nine the Master moved, sat up, stood up, and the light of life came back to his face and eyes. At the same moment all the rest with one consent sat up and breathed again. Then they rose, and, without the formalities of wishing each other good-night—'twas a House without any manners—they separated into two companies of men and women, and so filed out of the hall by the two doors which led respectively to the men's and the women's wing. Gilbert held back; he was left alone with the Master.

'You have seen,' said the latter, 'the way in which we spend our evenings. To-morrow you yourself will, perhaps, feel the gracious influence of the place. Sometimes there are

exercises; perhaps there have been some to-night.'

'There was dancing. Did you not hear or see, then?'

'I neither hear nor see; I am carried out of myself. Remember, we are each for himself. What everyone does, he does for himself. The soul is absolutely alone in the world. If any wants to dance, let him—it is for himself. As in a march some walk and some run, some ride, some lag behind, some are driven, some press on in front, so in this House, some possess, like myself, the gift of voluntary trance, and some must stir the sluggish soul. But, Brother Gilbert, forget the Past.'

So the Master passed out, and Gilbert sought his cell. The gas was alight in every room, and there was the sound as of the taking off of boots; the brothers were all going to bed.

But the room next to his own—that

of Brother Charles—was dark and empty. Where was Brother Charles?

Gilbert was excited by the adventures of the day; he rolled about unable to sleep. It was about two in the morning when he heard footsteps on the stairs—soft footsteps. They came along the corridor; they passed his room; they stopped at the next room—that of Brother Charles. He sat up and listened. To-morrow—nay, that day—the ordeal by battle should decide. He smiled to think of it: he had no fear. Meantime, what mischief had that saintly brother been about, that he should get up to his room four hours after the rest of the college? Would the gate porter take down his name? Would the Dean send for him? Would he be gated or rusticated before the duello? He fell asleep again before he found an answer to these questions, and dreamed of the dancing-girl.

CHAPTER IV.

LABORARE EST ORARE.

At half past five in the morning the Bell Terrible awoke and began to clash and clang with such discordancies that every man, woman, child, and pig, sprang headlong out of bed, as if obedience would quiet it. Gilbert, who in dreams was in the neighbourhood of St. James's, returned with violent haste to the House of Meditation, and remembered suddenly not only where he was, but also why he was there. And his eyes saw red.

There was no shrinking or hesitation in Gilbert's mind. He intended, with all

seriousness, to rid the earth of a man in order to bring freedom to a woman. This he would do out of the great reverence and worship which he entertained for this woman. Yet one must not, even in such a cause as this, commit common and brutal murder. Therefore there might be either the duel until one is killed—nobody calls that murder—after the good old fashion, or there might be the duel after the Western fashion, in which each man goes armed with the understanding that each may fire at sight. What would the Master say to such an arrangement? There was another method still—but Gilbert put this aside. How if the man refused the duello? One cannot always compel another to become a target. Well! the police were looking for him. There was a long list of crimes. If one were driven to the thing—it was not a pretty thing—there might be submitted a plain offer, an alternative—either arrest and trial on many charges,

imprisonment, probably for life; or the simple duel unto death, with the equal risk for both men. Which?

Gilbert dropped his revolver into his breast-pocket. He had to deal with an unknown quantity; things might be rushed upon him: the man evidently suspected him. He would wait, if possible, for a day or two, and see more of this Community.

The decision was like a reprieve. His eyes ceased to see red; he remembered the duties of the House; he made his bed, brushed his boots, swept out his room, and went downstairs and into the open. In the clear, strong light of the early morning—the sunrise in May is not so early there as here—he observed how beautifully the House, so hideous in itself, was situated. Behind it stretched the Berkshire hills, a lovely range covered with woods; a broad and shallow stream, clear, bright, and evidently filled with fish, ran winding through the estate; corn-

fields, meadows, orchards, coppice, covered the ground; only the ugly buildings—the workshops and sheds and farm buildings, the engine-room—all the places, which in England would have been venerable and beautiful with thatch and ivy and gables and windows, marred the scene. Already the tramp of heavy boots on the stairs showed that most of the men were up and going out to work. They were moving slowly and singly, not in pairs, towards the work shops. He was to work for his living as well. What work would he be expected to do?

Not knowing what to do or where to apply, he repaired, as one of the unemployed, to the hall. There he saw the Master sitting at the end of the table, quite alone, with books—the account-books of the House—spread out before him. Even in a monastery these must be kept—the hard, practical, matter-of-fact books of expenditure and

receipt. The House, like every other place, was run as a matter of business. It had to pay expenses. I suppose that it was a shock to the recluse, when he entered his hermitage and took possession, to learn that, after all, it had to pay expenses. Living costs at least so much, however much one may macerate. And even the hermit has got, somehow, from somebody, to get that amount as a minimum in cash or in kind.

Gilbert stood before the Master like a schoolboy waiting for a task.

The Master looked up. The prophetic light was gone. He was engaged in the daily task of ascertaining that both ends met. It was a prosperous Community; there was even a margin. But there were branches which did not pay; and these irritated the Master. This occupation robbed him of his dignity: he now looked like an old clerk, say, in a country brewery, where the clerks are not expected to wear black cloth coats;

he seemed to be one who had done nothing all his life but add up figures.

'You want work, do you?' he said irritably. 'It's more than some of them seem to want, then. I hope you mean to work, Brother Gilbert; you can't meditate all day long. It's against the spirit of the House. And it isn't fair on the others.'

'I understood yesterday that work is to be a servant and not a master.'

'Certainly. But while you work, remember that you are not at play. You work partly to subdue and fatigue the body, partly to occupy the mind, partly — which some seem to forget—to keep the House going. Well! what can you do? You have the look of a gentleman.' Certainly the Master looked and spoke with greater dignity as a Prophet. 'Well, I suppose you can do nothing except go out with a gun to kill God's creatures. That is all the English gentleman of my time could do.'

'I do not know any trade, to be sure; but you have a large garden. I think I might be of some use in the garden. Or, if not in the garden, I believe I understand something about horses.'

'Oh! You are a gardener?'

Gilbert did not set him right. Why should he? The Master had been so long out of the world that he had forgotten most things.

'Well, I'm glad to hear it. The other Englishman here — Brother Charles — who was also a gentleman once, and is now—something else, whatever he is, cannot do anything at all. I was brought up to the turnery trade myself, before I became a preacher in the Baptist connection where I first found light. Whenever I do any work now I always go back to the old trade. I was a good worker once—very good. Very well, you shall go into the garden. I am glad to find that you are not a gentleman. We don't want fine gentlemen here. Yet

you've just the same manner as my good and worthy friend, Cicely's father, who was my earliest disciple. And he was a gentleman. You might have been too proud for the Community. My dear friend and brother, in spite of his faith, found it difficult to remember that we are all equal here.'

'I will try to remember the equality.'

'As for me,' the Master continued; 'it is my daily work to keep the accounts. I am too old to need Fatigue. We've got a farm and a garden and workshops: we grow and make all we want, except our tea and coffee and a few other things; we sell everything that is over to get these simple luxuries—which are really necessaries. The body, you see, must be kept satisfied and in good temper—if possible without pain—while the soul inhabits it. Those who practise austerities and privations become mere slaves to a tortured body. Pain is a hindrance. They think it is a help; the more they suffer the

better they think themselves. We cultivate painlessness. So that we work in order to exercise the body; yet work, as I told you last night, must be a servant, not a master. And temptation comes in there, as well, because one may fall into the habit of slovenly work, or one may become lazy. And we have to live by our work.'

Gilbert sat down beside him.

'Tell me more,' he said, 'about the House—how you live and how you get on.'

The Master pushed away his books with alacrity and leaned back in his chair, folding his hands, as becomes one who is going to tell a story. And Authority returned to him.

'It is pleasant,' he said, 'to remember how we have grown and from what we have sprung. I told you that I was in the turnery trade, at first, in Clerkenwell; little as you would think it now. I got conviction and entered the ministry—a Baptist connection it

was—and I had a call. There I received the light——'

'How did it come?'

'As light always comes, with a sudden flash. Of course they wouldn't have me any longer. I wanted to convert the service of song and prayer and preaching into Meditation; they could not understand Meditation—so I had to go. Then I made the acquaintance of those two shining ones, Cicely's parents'—he cast his eyes upwards as if he saw them. Doubtless he did see them. 'They joined me, and we came here to lead by ourselves the Life of Meditation.'

'So that was how you began.'

'That was twenty years ago. I had just those two disciples, Cicely's parents. Her father bought the land. He had brought over enough money for that; the rest he left behind for anybody to take who chose. We put up a log hut and we began. . . .' He paused. 'Ah! That beginning!'

'You suffered privations?'

'We had no money: we had a hard struggle —my two disciples, man and wife—and I: we cleared the ground, we grew things, we lived on bread and potatoes with a little bacon; I went back to my turnery; he made traps and such notions, and peddled them. Then the baby came. That is the girl Cicely—my daughter, as I call her. The mother died—I think the hard life killed her; but the baby thrived. And her father died, but only four or five years ago. In Meditation I can see them both, every day: I converse with them, I share their happiness, I am mounting with them side by side. Otherwise I should desire to go hence and be no more seen.' The strange light that they used to call Enthusiasm returned to his eyes, and continued there. 'We got on,' he continued. 'Everything began to prosper with us. The blessing of increase lay upon our fields and our gardens like the sunshine of this beautiful

land. Our little homestead grew; we attracted people, the report and fame of us went about the world; here was a Community aiming solely at the Perfect Life, refusing to take money except for their needs, living in equality, despising the toys of Outside; in such a country as this, where the people are naturally inclined to religion, and yet are prone to fall into money-getting, the example is wholesome; and in a country like this of political equality, such a Community is sure to attract.

'So they came: they were curious at first, not being able to understand the contempt of wealth; but some remained. You are curious; you want to be pleased with us; but there are things which you do not understand. Wait in patience for a little. Our people are free to depart, but they remain. Nowhere else have they the same freedom from care. Some of us have been city clerks, hard-worked and badly paid, always in anxiety

about the daily bread ; here we have no such anxiety. Some have been tormented while in the world by ambition and disappointment, here there are no ambitions ; some by injury and wrong '—Gilbert changed colour—' here there are no such emotions. Some have fallen into habits of vice, drunkenness, gambling, and I know not what ; here there are no temptations. You have yourself doubtless found some of these hindrances in the world.'

' Truly.'

' Well, everybody works at something ; there is a town three or four miles away which takes all we have to sell ; we have a name for honesty and good work ; people who buy our jam don't get glucose and they don't get parsnips. A good name for thorough honesty is worth something, I can tell you.'

' I suppose so.'

' We have no rent to pay, no wages, no partners, no servants ; we only have to keep

ourselves. I have calculated that if everyone earned—over and above what we consume for ourselves—two dollars and a half every week, we should manage very well. But it is difficult to get this average of work out of them. Some of them, if they could, would be for ever meditating. We do not want money—I desire never to see money in the House. What we cannot exchange we put into a bank and exchange from that place.'

The Master in his simplicity could not understand that having money in a bank was exactly the same thing as having it in the House.

'Have you any money, young man?'

'Yes: that is, there may be a little, somewhere.' He coloured slightly, being a young man of great possessions.

'Leave it there. Never ask after it—let it go. That is what my first disciples did. They just left their money behind them.'

'I thought of offering a gift of money to

the House,' said Gilbert. 'I fear, however, that it would not be accepted.'

'It would not. Go, instead, and work. Young man, there is something, I know not, standing between you and the gate of the Upward Path. Until that obstacle is removed I fear that Meditation will be impossible for you. Go now and work.'

He sighed, drew the books down again; obviously resisted a powerful temptation to meditate; and became again the clerk and accountant.

Outside, work was now going on in full swing. Gilbert looked into the workshops, where a great number of industries were carried on, the most important appearing to be the turning of chair legs. There were, however, many other trades: there were dressmakers, sempstresses, shoemakers, saddlers, carpenters, upholsterers, bookbinders, decorators, turners, cabinet-makers; and others. Some of them worked listlessly, even sitting

beside their work, with hanging hands and eyes far away; they were the spirits who would fain pass their whole time in the trance which they called Meditation; others worked steadily, after the manner of good and trained workmen; others, again, worked by fits and starts, feverishly; these were the restless, unsatisfied souls, those who had to dance in order to invite the sleep of Meditation.

No one spoke to his neighbour; there was the whirr of the engine from the engine-room; there was the sound of the work itself; there was the click of the tools; but there was no voice. No one spoke. It was like a Carthusian House, save that there was no Rule. If you think of it, to those who never read, who have no connection with the outer world; to whom there comes no news of the outer world; who have no longer brothers or sisters, parents, or enemies, or friends; who try to bury and forget the Past; who use no form of prayer and have no litanies to chant

and no services to attend ; to whom one day is like another, save that one may be cold and one may be hot ; to these people there is nothing to talk about. Why should they talk ? In a Benedictine monastery there are the ambitions and the offices of the house ; here there are no offices and no ambitions.

Nobody appeared to notice him : one expects, in such a house, a flocking of the members to the new-comer, if only to congratulate him upon his arrival or to ask why he has come, or what news he brings from the outer world, or if it is true, as reported, that the devil is dead. There was no notice taken of him at all.

He left the workshops and looked round the farmyard, and was enabled to understand why his neighbour, Brother Silas, suggested that occupation at supper. He repaired to the scene of his labours. He was to be a gardener.

Of all human occupations gardening is by

far the most interesting. The gardener not only cultivates the soil, making it produce delicious peaches, strawberries, plums and pears, apples and quinces ; radishes and cabbages ; roses and lilies ; corn and barley ; but he also cultivates many most useful human faculties — such as patience, self-sacrifice, observation, perseverance, memory, forethought and many other things. It is not without meaning that Adam is said to have been a gardener. For my own part, I have never been able to understand why kings and the great ones of the earth, who have often become watchmakers, carpenters, cabinet-makers, chemists, poets and painters, have never become gardeners. They always have a garden of their own—yea, a back garden and a front garden ; they have every opportunity of self-improvement by means of the garden ; yet so far as we have got in history the kings and the great ones of the earth have neglected that opportunity.

The gardens covered a large area; there were flower-farms, kitchen-farms, and fruit-farms. It was the month of May, when things are growing and blossoming, and ripening fast. The splendid sun of America warmed the buds and flowers through and through; it never fails; our own summers grow cold and wet for twenty years on end; but in the States the summer sun fails not, any more than the winter ice and snow. In the gardens were employed a good many of the members, men and women. Like the men in the workshops, they spoke not at all to each other.

With a hoe in his hand, which he held as one who never brandished that instrument before, Brother Charles stood over a piece of ground. Now and then he stuck his hoe into the earth; for the most part he gazed at his work with a kind of loathing. Never was disgust written upon human face more plainly.

Not far from him the girl Cicely was at work among the rose-bushes. Presently she drew nearer to the man with the hoe. Now, he was exactly the opposite of Bunyan's man with the muck-rake; for Bunyan's friend raked with zeal with his eyes cast down, but this man did not rake at all—he looked upwards and sidewards and forwards and backwards, and every way but downwards. Had there been an angel hovering over him with a crown of gold he would certainly have seen that angel and would have proposed a game of *écarté*, with that crown as the stake.

'Brother Charles,' said Cicely firmly, 'that is not the way to handle a hoe. See—I will show you. I am sure you can learn if you choose. If you do not like gardening there are many other things to do. You can go into the farm-yard.'

'No, no—I like gardening.'

'You are doing nothing at all to-day; you did nothing yesterday. If you go on idling,

the Committee will criticise you. It is a dreadful thing for the Committee to criticise you. You never remain at the hour of Meditation. Perhaps they would not so much mind that, for a time; but we cannot keep with us a man who will not work and does not wish to meditate.'

'Perhaps it is because I am restless.'

'Perhaps. You are always thinking over your Past. Can you not forget it? It is a terrible Past, I know—I can see so much in your face. Will you always be tied and bound by your Past?'

The man dropped his eyes. 'Never mind my Past,' he said huskily.

'There is the Present—here. And the Future—where you please.'

'Where I please,' he echoed. 'Yes, where I please.'

'Why do you stay with us?'

'For Elevation, I suppose,' he replied, with an ugly sneer; 'like the rest.'

'It will be difficult,' thought Gilbert, looking on, 'to persuade this man to adopt an honourable and happy despatch.'

Cicely left him and turned to meet Gilbert.

'You are going to work in the garden?' she said, with a smile of welcome on her sweet and serious face.

If she had looked ethereal in her dance last night, she was even more lovely among the flowers in the morning sunshine. How came this flower here among these common vegetables?

'Oh! I am so pleased,' she went on simply. 'You will work with me. Perhaps I can help you a little, because you are strange to us. And no work, I always think, is half so good for us in this Community as gardening. We are out every day under the sky, and among the things that grow and blossom for us, we have no temptation to think of the past. Sometimes

the hours pass and I feel as if it had been one long Meditation.'

'Without any dancing?'

'You saw me last night? Dancing helps me.'

'Oh! but you dance most beautifully. Who taught you?'

'No one. I have always danced. But I cannot dance with the others. To-night if you try to meditate you will not be able to see me dancing. If it is any hindrance to you I will not dance.'

'I would much rather see you dance than go off into Meditation.'

'Brother Gilbert'—she laid her hand upon his arm, not timidly, nor yet boldly, but without any hesitation or any blushes—'do not speak of our Meditation until you understand it. I should like you to remain with us. You remind me, somehow, of my father: you speak like him, with the same soft voice—he had a very sweet voice; and you look

like him, thoughtful, with deep eyes—only yours are troubled.'

'I am glad to be like your father, Cicely.'

'Yes. But you have not attained to his heights.' She withdrew her hand, and over her face there fell something of the strange, rapt, far-off look which Gilbert had observed in the Master. 'He has risen so high—so high—whither I cannot reach. My mother is with him. They come down to meet me every day and talk to me.'

'Cicely!' cried Gilbert, 'come back to earth. Tell me,' he said, after a pause, 'are there many people in this House like you and the Master? Do you all see visions and have dreams?'

'I do not know. We live every one for himself. Only the Master talks to me. Sometimes I know what he sees and where he goes. For my own part, at Meditation time I sit with my father and my mother and they

speak to me. I will ask them to help you, if you will try.'

'If I will try,' Gilbert repeated dubiously.

'As yet you cannot, because your mind is darkened. You are thinking of something gloomy; it fills your soul with sadness; yet you are not a bad man. Not like that other'—she looked at the man with the hoe—'his soul is black through and through. Yours is full of gleams.'

'You are a witch, Cicely.'

'Put it from you, Gilbert. Forget the Past. Leave bad people and bad things behind. Let your soul lie open to the light.'

She spoke like the Master, because he was the only one who ever talked with her.

'No, Cicely,' Gilbert answered his own question, 'there can be no others in the House like yourself.' He thought of their voracity at supper, of their stupid silence, of their shuffling, ungraceful dance, of their

vacuous faces. 'If these people were like you, Cicely, if they had your mind, they would no longer remain in silence; they would be constrained to talk, if it were only to tell their thoughts to each other, like the birds who cannot choose but sing.'

CHAPTER V.

A WARNING AND A PROMISE.

GILBERT took off his coat—the regulation coat—and set to work. 'I must earn,' he said, 'my board, which is three square meals a day—pork and beans, and steak and coffee—and two dollars and a half a week over and above—say, about seven dollars a week in all. This means zeal.'

The work set before him was of the lightest possible kind—a little weeding and clearing; nothing could be lighter. Yet unaccustomed stooping made the shoulders ache; he was fain to straighten himself and from time to time look about him. Cicely

was going about among her roses, her face always set with a serious responsibility, as if she were doing something especially sacred, such as decorating the altar—she who had never seen an altar; or making beautiful for the next day's service the pillars of the church—she who had never seen a church or any pillars of a church. She showed no signs of wishing to continue the conversation; in fact, she had learned one lesson at least in the House of Silence—not to give utterance to vain repetitions. In this respect the fashion of the world is so very different. We not only repeat vainly, but we cannot do anything, persuade anybody, or breathe the simplest truth without vain repetitions: they are a necessity. Formerly, the Sage, when he had anything to say, came forth with importance, and, after commanding silence, said, once for all, what he had to say; then he went in again and waited for the next message. In these days he has to say what

he is charged to say a dozen times over—first, in a monthly magazine; at the first delivery of the message no one listens. He then says it again, in another form; at the second delivery people are irritated. He then says it a third time; then they begin to call him names and to throw stones at him, because novelty frightens and irritates them. Perhaps at the fourth or fifth delivery, if there is nothing in the doctrine to interfere with income, the world may consent to listen. Even then the Sage must go on repeating his message, else the whole will be speedily forgotten. At this House there were so few words spoken that everyone had a chance of being heard. 'Let your soul lie open to the light,' Cicely said. 'Lie open to the light!' And his presence in the House was due to such a purpose! If she only knew! The incongruity between purpose and pretence — if he had made pretence — was ridiculous. In the silence of the garden the

words rang in his brain—'lie open to the light.' What things had to be done before that opening of the soul to the light!

But he had resolved to defer this purpose while he observed the ways of the Community—a relief, for a time, to forget this terrible purpose. And he fell once more to considering the place where he had found his enemy. A strange, mysterious place! The retreat of rustics, apparently—yet, of rustics who fell into trances, had raptures and saw visions. Well, if it is given to any people to see visions, it must surely be to the country folk, who work alone in the field and forest, that such privilege is given. A place dominated by a man of strong magnetic force, who certainly believed what he said, and might, had he chosen to remain among men, have drawn multitudes to follow him, such was the power of his voice and of his words. A place with something of the desert about it, situated, like an abode of Eremites, in a lonely place

under the everlasting hills, with a rushing stream to sit beside (nothing assists Meditation more than a running stream); a place outside the world; a place whither came no letters or news or papers; dedicated, like a Buddhist monastery, to that sublime selfishness in which no one cares for his brother, but is entirely occupied with his own advancement; a religious house in which there was neither chapel nor service—where the mind, stripped of dogma and creed, of teaching and of teacher, looked inwards for nourishment and for inspiration.

Thinking these things, he waited till Cicely, in her round, again drew near to him. Then once more he spoke to her. 'Those heights, Cicely — those levels of which you speak. What are they like when you reach them? What are the dreams and visions which come to you in your trance?'

'The levels are spiritual levels. The

place is always the world. How can I explain? This world will always remain. There are as many worlds as there are men, yet only one real world. It is the perfect world which we are trying to see and to understand. To all of us there are worlds of different levels, invisible to each other. Outside our own world, above us and below us, are infinite worlds, always the same. When we are ready to go up to the world above us, we are taken up. Yet there is only one world, and that world you are not able to see or understand. What you see with your short sight is only a fragment.'

As she spoke she became like the Master —transformed. She became glorified. Her eyes were filled with light—she became a goddess.

'Then you will soon be taken up, and we shall lose you, Cicely.'

She shook her head. Compliments she did not understand. 'We live out our lives.

We are called away only when at this stage we can learn no more.'

'Well — but always the same world? Always pie and pork and beans?'

'Don't look like that, Gilbert. I cannot tell you anything if you look like that. It makes me feel ill; it makes your soul black when you mock. You must not think of things gross and material when your soul should lie open to the light.'

'I will not. But there will be always this House?'

'There will be always, I suppose, some company of men and women trying to rise higher and higher to the greater happiness.'

'The greater happiness,' he repeated. 'That is what I cannot understand. What constitutes the greater happiness? What will you do with it when you have got it?'

'You cannot understand. Why talk any more? First, you must clear your mind of the Past, and then you must learn how to

rest before you are able to take a single step.'

She turned away and continued her work. Gilbert looked after her, moved by her sincerity and her earnestness.

There are moments for some men—not for all, because most men are unable to feel these things, and for the few only in youth and early manhood—when it seems really possible to stand outside the environment of time and matter; when the raptures of saints, the visions of nuns, the ejaculations of anchorites, the stories of spiritualists, seem not idle dreams and fond imaginings, but true liftings of the Veil which hides the only things that are real and everlasting. At such moments a cloud rolls over the eyes; the walls of the room vanish; everything vanishes, and one is alone in space. It passes quickly for the most part; the strange feeling, which was always in the mind of the Master, has come and is gone in a moment,

before one has had time to consider what it means, or to ask any questions, or to learn if any questions may be asked. While the Master spoke to him, Gilbert experienced this feeling. When Cicely spoke to him in the garden, he experienced it once more. It was not the first time. When he was a boy of seventeen, certain poetry drew him out of himself. When he heard music of a certain kind, he was fain to sit down and surrender himself. So, when he travelled abroad, and made the acquaintance of dervishes, fakeers, Moravian missionaries, and sometimes Catholic priests, worn and devoted, the same emotion seized him. Some books of biographies filled him with this sense; some flowers inspired him with this yearning after the power of living outside life—the power, in short, claimed by the people of this House. Now his brain was filled with a kind of glory, left there by the words and the voice and the eyes of this girl. At such a moment

if self-surrender were possible, everything would be possible: trance—visions—voices of the dead—and the lifting of the Veil.

His heart glowed within him. He could not choose but believe the girl. Her eyes were as sincere as her heart was pure, as her maiden soul was innocent. When he should be able to rest . . . but the Purpose stood between.

'You want rest?' It was the voice, cold, hard, and metallic, of the man he was hunting. He stood with his hoe over his shoulder on the other side of the bushes. 'I have overheard your conversation with the girl. Rest is what we all want, isn't it?—rest and Meditation and Elevation. Yes—oh yes—Elevation!'

The glow and the joy of his dreams fled shrieking, driven away by this evil presence.

'You had better go on with your work,' said Gilbert shortly.

'Presently—presently. All in good time.

You needn't break your back in this place. As for work, I suppose you don't really like blistering your hands and cramping your legs over a beastly hoe any more than I do. I chose gardening because no one knows whether you do anything or not.' He sat down on a barrow. 'I'm going to take a spell of rest. Let us talk. I was astonished, last night, to see you come in, because you have the appearance and the manners of an English gentleman, and you don't look like a Crank. As for me, I come here because I want complete rest, which a man can't get anywhere else. It was over-work—intellectual kind—writing. My doctor told me of this place. Light physical exercise, simple food, absolute silence, no telegrams, no letters, no newspapers—that is what I get here. I do not pretend to meditate, as they call it. I am never carried away in a trance; but I am quiet. That's my little simple story, Mr. Maryon. What is yours?'

'Mine? Oh! mine is still simpler.'

'You are not a religious Crank, like the rest of them. And you don't look as if you were nervous. I heard you talking to that girl just now. Well, she's the only pretty thing in the place. You look that kind of man—I shan't interfere. Besides, I shall be going in a week or two. Don't mind me.'

His cold face showed neither leer nor grin: there was nothing of the Satyr in the man; but it expressed evil of the most evil.

Gilbert felt an intense desire to kill the creature, but refrained.

'How long did you say you were going to stay?'

'Probably a week or two longer. The people are rustics; the food is coarse; there is nothing to drink; there is nothing to do; there is nothing to talk about; but one can be quiet. As for you, I suppose that little girl—well, they are all blind and deaf and

dumb: you can do just what you like—I shan't interfere.'

Gilbert stepped across the beds and stood over him. He was a big strong man, and the other, though as tall, was slight and spare.

'Look here—you—Charles Lee, as you call yourself. I dare say I shall have some little accounts to make up with you presently. Meantime, be very careful never to mention that young lady's name again in my presence. If you do I will horsewhip you.'

The man looked ugly, but he made no reply.

'As for your coming here, we know all about that. It is a convenient spot for a man who wants to be out of the way: a place not likely to be suspected——'

'Out of the way?' The man changed colour. 'What do you mean?'

'Such a man, I say, might very well think that no one would look for him in such a place.'

'What the DEVIL do you mean, sir?' The man spoke with a poor show of surprise.

'I mean just what I say. Mr. Charles Lee thinks that he is safe so long as he remains in this House—so long as no one suspects this House—so long as no one comes to look for him. Very well, Mr. Charles Lee is quite right. The police are not suspicious about this place; they are looking for him in all the dives from Chicago to New Orleans. But they will not come here to look for him *unless they are sent for.*'

Mr. Charles Lee sat down again upon the barrow. 'The police?' he repeated. 'The police? What have the police to do with me?' He watched Gilbert with unmistakable terror in his eyes. He looked furtively about him as if meditating flight.

'That is your business, not mine.' He had gone so far, he thought, that he might just as well go on and complete the job on the spot—say, after breakfast.

'Who are you? What do you want with me? Who told you?' Then he suddenly threw up his arms. 'Oh! I remember now. You are Gilbert Maryon. You are the son of General Sir Harry Maryon, K.C.B. Oh yes! What the DEVIL are you doing here? I never met you at home, but I have heard about you. Yes: you were in the Foreign Office; you became an unpaid *attaché*—I remember.'

'I would not remember too much if I were you.'

'Why not?'

'Because you might happen to remember what your own name used to be and why you left England. I don't ask you to tell me, understand. It would be a pity to give yourself away, wouldn't it?'

In spite of his proud bearing, the man shivered from head to foot. There was one thing, then, that touched him still: his own disgrace; the memory of what he had been.

'What have you done?' he asked. 'Why are you here? How do you know—what you do know?'

'It is full early for personal and private conundrums, isn't it? Wait a bit. I do not desire your society, but I shall have to speak seriously to you very soon. Of that I warn you. We may, some time or other, perhaps this day, exchange confidences and confessions.'

'What confidences?'

'As to why and how you left your native country. Already I have learned that it must have been a very short time ago, because you knew that I was in the Foreign Office; and that you must have been a man of the Piccadilly End, otherwise you would not have known that little fact. Besides, you have the survival of manner, although your face must have changed since you were received in London houses. Your story, in fact, should be interesting. Mine, I confess, would be commonplace in comparison.'

'Then tell me,' he insisted, still with that terror in his face, 'why you have come here; how you learned—what you know.'

'Not yet. It is the story of a villain and his punishment. I will tell you presently—after breakfast, perhaps. There goes the bell. Go now, and feed.'

He left the man on the barrow, his face full of fear and suspicion and uncertainty, and turned his steps towards the hall and breakfast.'

He was joined by Cicely, who laid her hand upon his arm.

'Brother Gilbert,' she said. 'Not to-day. Promise me, not to-day.'

'What?' he asked. 'What am I not to do this day?'

'Not to-day,' she repeated, as if she divined his purpose and knew his secret. 'Promise me, not to-day.'

'What is it, Cicely? Put the promise into words: what is it that I must not do this day?'

'I do not know what they mean'—she did not explain who 'they' were. 'They told me to make you promise, not to-day. You must promise, Gilbert. It is my mother's order. Not to-day.'

'Your mother's order? Your dead mother's order?' He hesitated. One look at her serious face determined him. He obeyed. 'Well, little witch, I promise. Not to-day.'

CHAPTER VI.

'NOT TO-DAY.'

THE House breakfast proved to be very nearly the same as the supper. What can one ask that is better than steak, bacon, ham, pork and beans, with hot cake and all kinds of cakes and jam? The body, as the Master said, must be kept in good case and painless, in order for the soul to be free. When hunger gnaws, or when rheumatics bite, the soul becomes nothing better than a groaning prisoner—which shows how mistaken the ascetics and eremites have all been in mortifying the flesh. Twice and three times as spiritually disposed is that soul which reposes

in a body well fed and nourished and comfortable.

The one o'clock dinner was also very nearly the same as the breakfast and the supper. The Fraternity, in fact, had but one meal — a square meal, quadrilateral and rectangular—taken three times daily. As they knew what to expect, they were saved from vain lookings forward and from speculations as to possible or unattainable good things which trouble some folk. Iced water, tea and coffee were served at every meal, and of course if the food was coarse and indifferently cooked it was exactly what most of the members had been accustomed to receive all their lives.

In every kind of hunt, the sympathy of the onlookers is always with the hunter, seldom with the hunted. Especially is this the case with the hunt of man. He has to be run down, he has to be caught: how will it be done? That is what everybody asks; in certain

circles, however, the question is—how will he escape? Great as is the ingenuity of the man hunted, still greater is the ingenuity of the detective. The hunted man flies, he runs out of sight, he disguises himself, he hides, he assumes a beard, he cuts off a beard, he puts on eyeglasses, he takes them off, he puts on a wig, he changes his name, his dress, his carriage, he has a thousand tricks and turns; yet in the end he is caught, generally by some accident which Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the detective, turns to his own account. Can we not admire the cleverness of the man who is hunted? Never mind why he is hunted, probably in order that he may no longer eat up other men; let us watch the cleverness of the quarry.

Here was a man whom all the police in the United States were looking for; in every town they had his portrait and a description of him and information of his way of life. Every place closed to him, except this. He

knocked at the door of this House and was admitted. Here he was quite safe; no police ever came to the place, it was unsuspected, it was a modern sanctuary. And here he had rested for three weeks and more, feeling himself for the first time in absolute security. There were certain drawbacks in the life here, but he was safe from pursuit. And then came this young Englishman. Why did he come to the place?

There is one branch of thought-reading which is common to all mankind, except the very stupid. This class, as we know, feel nothing, fear nothing, anticipate nothing, and desire nothing. They are incapable of imagination, love, hatred, or any other passion whatever. All but the very stupid, however, possess the power of divining whether another man is a friend or an enemy. This instinct is a survival of the days when man was a fighting animal, and a hunting animal, and a hunted animal. He could then

hear and see his enemy miles off; he could scent his enemy when he was invisible; he acquired this power through the instinct of self-preservation: even now, when he hunts no longer, he can perceive at first sight if a man will prove a friend or an enemy. The man Charles Lee, who was at the moment a hunted animal, recognised, at the first sight of Gilbert, an enemy. This made him uneasy, particularly as he could not by any thinking arrive at a working theory as to why this young fellow should be an enemy, what he was doing in this House, and how he came to know anything about that ring—if he did know anything. He felt so uneasy that he would have gone away but for the absolute certainty that nowhere else could be found a place of such safety: the only place in the world where the residents showed no curiosity at all about a new-comer, and did not question him and did not talk about him. Such a place was to a hunted

man like a Fortress Impregnable, a Château Gaillard. For three weeks he had lived unnoticed among them ; nobody spoke to him except the Master and this girl. And now came this young Englishman, who knew at least that he was in hiding. He was very uneasy indeed.

Other things made the fugitive uncomfortable : lesser things ; everything that must be expected when one has to run away : part of the stage management, the 'business' of running away. The ring had been conducting its operations, having acquired the power of spending freely, in great cities, where there is variety of meals, not the same meal ; and variety of food, not the same food ; where there are hotels, and where there are, sometimes, cooks ; where, also, there are drinks like the juice of the grape and the juice of the barley. How dreadful, therefore, were the sufferings of this unfortunate man, condemned to feed upon nothing

but tough steak and pork and beans, and to drink nothing, either with his meals or between them, but tea and coffee and iced water! There was no tobacco, there was not a cigar in the place, and he had no money to buy any. That there was no conversation under the circumstances mattered little. And he had to do manual work. He was expected to take a rake or a hoe or a spade, and to work, actually to work, in the garden.

There was once a great criminal, almost as great a criminal as this person. They tried to convert him with prison, but he found himself among old friends and was comparatively happy; at all events, he continued as far removed as ever from penitence. They flogged him: he took his flogging as one of the disagreeable accidents of life—like toothache, but sooner over—and went back to his old friends; they locked him up quite alone—as soon as he was let out he went

back to his old friends; they gave him a kind chaplain and a sympathetic visitor who prayed with him and wept with him; he enjoyed the weeping very much, and he then went back to his old friends. Finally they hit upon a plan which at least made him entirely miserable, because there was no hope left to him: he was never allowed to go back to his friends at all, and he had to spend the remainder of his life among people who neither drank nor gambled, nor thieved, nor planned iniquities, nor committed crimes, great or small, but lived with the most disgusting and intolerable purity, temperance and virtue. This seemed, for the moment, the only future possible for the man who called himself Charles Lee. He could not go back to his old friends, first because they were dispersed, and next because at every road which led to the former haunts of these interesting people stood the sheriff with an order for his arrest. And oh! how he hated the place he was in!

After breakfast they went back to work. Mr. Charles Lee, hoe in hand, contrived to keep within sight of Gilbert. Nothing at all happened. Gilbert went on quietly with his work; there was no conversation at all between him and the girl; nor did Gilbert address any remarks to him. What did he know? What did he mean by settling accounts? Nothing, either in London or in America, had ever passed between him and that young man. How did he learn what he evidently knew? The more he thought about it, the more uneasy he became.

At one o'clock they sat down to dinner, which was, as has been stated already, exactly the same as breakfast and supper. Gilbert observed that his left-hand neighbour, Brother Silas, devoured the same meal three times a day with the same voracity and despatch. He was a heavy-looking young man, square jawed, with high cheek-bones, big limbed. Like all the men in the place, he had a

ruminating eye. The man who ruminates is not always the man who meditates. Brother Silas ruminated. He fed slowly, but steadily and thoroughly, like an ox, gazing into space the while. Was it possible that this dull and clownish head contained a brain capable of seeing visions, and dreaming dreams, and taking flights into other worlds? Gilbert endeavoured, out of curiosity, to make the man talk: he put forth tentatives, he suggested questions, he gave openings; nothing could be got out of the man but a grunt. It might be imagination, but Gilbert thought that a gleam of light shot across those ruminating eyes once or twice, when the man turned his head slowly and his eyes fell upon Cicely, the one sweet and dainty figure in the whole company. Could he have so much grace as to admire this girl? Was Love admitted into the Community?

After dinner the people separated slowly and silently. A few turned them round in

their places and, leaning back as if for Meditation, frankly dropped into slumber. There was no mistaking the difference between the Meditation of the evening and the sleep of the afternoon. The latter was honest, drowsy, afternoon doze; the former was trance. Others rolled slowly—the rolling gait comes to those who loaf as well as those who tread the yielding deck—out of the hall and took their seat on the benches in the verandah. Some walked up and down the wooden walk before the House, languidly, with hanging hands and vacant eyes. Some stood still and looked out into space, seeing nothing; some set off with briskness and then changed their minds and came back again: there was no sign of settled purpose, or of any brain activity at all. Upon all there lay the same dull and vacuous look. Not without wisdom did Benedict enjoin in his brethren the work of the body or the work of the mind when they were not chanting hymns in the abbey church.

Gilbert moved about among them and spoke to one or two. They were morose in their manner; the words seemed to irritate them: they answered in monosyllables. Their irritation was not altogether disinclination to answer, it was partly inability. If you remain absolutely silent for a long time—for many years—during which you read nothing, hear nothing, and speak nothing, you will become, like Alexander Selkirk, unable to speak except with great difficulty. At the very best our powers of speech are extremely limited: under such conditions they may vanish altogether, more especially with men no longer young, who have never received much education; who have lived solitary lives in the fields; and have never at any time enjoyed much converse with their fellow-men.

The women were brighter and more alert both in face and in movement. To begin with, it is impossible to keep in silence a company of women working together. Those

who sit and sew, those who make and mend, those who cook and wash up, those who order dairy and laundry, have a great deal to say over their work. Here they called it necessary talk, not frivolous talk; and this talk kept them alive, even though for the rest of the day they observed the wonted silence of the House.

One of these, a little slight woman, between forty and fifty years of age, her hair streaked with gray, with bright, beady eyes, and a sharp face, attracted Gilbert, because she looked so much more alive than the rest. He ventured to address her. She was sitting in a corner of the verandah, and she had some knitting in her hand; she was the only woman who was occupied in this feminine manner, and she looked curiously natural and, therefore, out of place.

'Well, young man,' she said, 'if you want to talk about the House, you may. That's improvin' talk. We're set against idle talk,

but you're a new-comer and perhaps you want to learn. Sit down, then, and ask.'

'Tell me,' said Gilbert, 'about your Meditation.'

'That's always the trouble, at first. You can't meditate, not worth a cent, can you? I couldn't when I began. I came here twenty years ago, soon after the Master started the House and just before Sister Cicely was born. I was in terrible trouble, I remember, about something or somebody; you wouldn't believe what a wrench it took to get all that trouble out of my head. But I persevered, thank the Lord! and forgot everybody and had my mind clear at last; and I've never thought about my own trouble ever since. And I meditate lovely every night.'

It seemed, to the new-comer, rather a selfish way of getting higher up; but he refrained from saying so.

'If it's any comfort to you, young man—

you look as if your thoughts were elsewhere, perhaps with some girl or other—I may tell you that in a very few weeks I was able just to sit down, fold my hands, and go off—go off—up into the clouds.'

'Yes. And what do you see when you are up in the clouds?'

'It might be the New Jerusalem, for all I know,' she replied vaguely. 'It's jest grand and glorious; it fills me all over with a kind of warmth——'

'But what is it you see when you get there?' Gilbert persisted.

'Don't I tell you? It's grand and glorious. I come back all in a glow. Isn't that enough?'

'Then you see nothing?'

'When you come back from the other world,' the woman replied without hesitation, 'you can't never tell what you've seen; everything goes clean out of your head; you jest remember where you've been. Nothing is left but the glow.'

'I understand. Do you think the other people here enjoy the same glow, the same experience of the other world, as yourself?'

'We don't know much about each other. Sometimes there's whispering about this one or that one—and what we see, and what we hear, and what we remember. We women talk about it a little over our work. There's jealousies sometimes about who gets highest. Sister Cicely goes up ever so high. But the Master soars higher than anybody else.'

'Quite so. And what is your own work in the morning?'

'I work in the dairy. Young man, mind you choose the hardest, not the lightest work. Dig in the garden, if you can. Take a spade and dig. Do something to make the body tired, if you wish to meditate quickly and easily.'

'I will remember. And now tell me who they are, and where they come from, and why they come here.'

'I don't know who the brothers and sisters are, nor where they come from. It isn't any business of mine where they come from. When first they come they talk sometimes. Some of the women were driven here by cruel scorn. Oh, but it is for their own good, and after a bit they know it. Then they forget the Past—it drops clean from their souls like a garment that one takes off. Yes, young man, your Past will fall from you: perhaps you've been wicked—it doesn't matter; or unfortunate; or perhaps you've been disappointed in love—nothing matters. After a bit the world will be quite dead to you: nothing will be left but the care of keeping the body from pain and the mind from thought, so as to leave the blessed soul free to soar. You will get to understand by bits that you are all by yourself in space, and no concern with anybody else.'

'Isn't that rather a selfish way of looking at things?'

'It's the Lord's own doing, young man, and you can't undo it. Therefore, I say, forget your Past. It is gone by; you can't alter it. Bury it and forget it.'

'I have always thought that the Past never dies and can never be forgotten. What if one cannot forget the Past?'

'Then you will be criticised by the Committee. It is a dreadful thing to be criticised by the Committee.'

Cicely said the same thing to the brother with the hoe.

'Oh! What is the Committee?'

'Young man,' she took up her knitting, 'I've talked enough.'

'One moment.' Gilbert laid his hand upon the knitting, which is well known as a narcotic. 'One moment. Is the Past really forgotten? Have you really forgotten that old trouble? Do you never ask what became of him? Do you never wonder why he wronged you? Do you never ask why

he married the other? Or if he repents his wickedness? Or if——'

'Oh!'—she dropped her knitting with a cry of pain, and answered as one who must, —'if I remember! Yes! yes! I think I forget; but I don't. Oh! I remember all day long, except in the evening, when I force myself to forget and so to rest for an hour.'

'Just so,' said Gilbert. 'The Past can never be forgotten. It is like your shadow; it can never be cut off.'

He left her, shaking and trembling, hands and head and shoulders. He had recalled something of that past trouble. He sighed in pity for the poor woman, who was trying her best to live in a fool's paradise, and turned away.

Gilbert retreated to the garden, where Cicely was still among her roses, walking about with clasped hands and thoughtful face. What were the thoughts of this girl who knew nothing?

'What do you do,' he asked, 'all the long afternoon?'

'Generally I am out here. Sometimes I sit indoors. The time seems long to you because you have forgotten how to rest.'

'I should like to read.'

'Oh no!' she said, 'you must not read. Nothing hinders rest more than reading. I used to read before I arrived at the age of Meditation—not since. Go and sit down somewhere by yourself in a corner; shut your eyes; try to forget the Past. You are in the world still; you are thinking of it all day long; and you are disturbed by something evil that has come to you out of the world. Forget the Past, Gilbert, and be happy with us. Oh, if you only knew it, this is the most beautiful House! There can be no place more delightful—if you only knew it.'

'I wish I did know it, then. But tell me, Cicely, what do you see when you meditate after your wonderful dance?'

'I see my father and my mother. Every night we are all three together on heights far above this. They tell me things.'

'What things do they tell you?'

'When I return to earth I have forgotten. That is to say, for the time. I shall remember everything when I am worthy to speak and this House is worthy to hear. The words come back to me when I go back to them, and my heart is so softened, so warm, and so happy. Oh, Gilbert! if you knew. Only to think of it makes me long for you to feel it too.'

'Child, what is the good of hearing things you can't remember? How can they affect your life?'

'My life? You mean my life here? Oh! but that doesn't count. I have nothing to do with my life here but to get through it.'

'Well. Then what do you see? What is your mother like? How is she dressed?'

'I don't know. When I come back to

earth I have no recollection of such things. Yet, when I see her again, I know her again.'

'What is the good of seeing them if you cannot tell what they are like?'

'Gilbert, you know nothing. That *is* my true life—to be with them. It is my happiness and my joy. All the rest is show and a weariness—unless it is to see the flowers grow. Go away now, Gilbert. You disturb me too much.'

He obeyed. He wandered about the gardens, finding no rest or peace. The place was interesting, the girl was interesting; he was a young man open to impression and interested by this kind of profession or pretence; but everything was marred by the presence of the man Charles Lee, and the thought of what had to be done.

He found himself presently in the shrubbery where were the seats. He sat down, his mind agitated, as far from rest as is

possible for any man, even outside the House of Meditation.

Presently the man himself who filled his thoughts came up to him and stood before him, dark and threatening.

'I want to know,' he said, 'what you meant this morning when you said that you had accounts to settle with me.'

'Did I say so? Well, then, in good time. Not to-day—I have promised. Not to-day. I shall settle those accounts with you another time.'

'You will explain now.' The man's face grew darker and more threatening.

'I shall choose my own time. Do you understand? My own time.'

'I have seen men shot for less.'

'You will not shoot me, Mr. Charles Lee. At least, not yet.'

'I have a right to demand an explanation. Come, Mr. Gilbert Maryon, you were once an English gentleman, whatever you are now.

Suppose you had used those words to a man in any club of which you were a member ?'

'I cannot suppose such a thing possible.'

'You charged me, in so many words, with hiding from the hands of Justice. Will you tell me, I ask once more, what you meant by that ?'

'Well, I don't mind explaining so much. You have been, among other things, a leading member, perhaps the cleverest member, of a certain ring or long firm, or whatever it was called : a combination for purposes of plunder and robbery. You possess a certain distinction of appearance and manner, and generally played the part of the moneyed man, the aristocratic traveller, or any part requiring manners and appearance. At last you were everywhere blown upon, the police took up the case, the gang was broken up ; you are now all separated and either arrested or in hiding. That is what I meant, Mr. Charles Lee.'

The man laughed, but without much merriment.

'I dare say,' he replied, 'that you are right about the gang. It does not concern me, because, you see, I am not the man in question. His name may be Charles Lee or it may be something else. I don't know or care.'

'In that case you have only to march out of this place, which evidently does not suit you. But you will not leave it yet.'

'Why not?'

'Because in whatever American town you venture to show your face, you will find that they have got a photograph and an exact description of your personal appearance. Because, my friend, you are wanted very badly. Oh no, you will not leave this place.'

'I shall leave it,' he replied, with a very good assumption of dignity, 'when it suits me.'

'If I thought you were going to leave us

before it suits *me*,' Gilbert replied, 'I would call in the sheriff of the nearest town.'

'By ——,' the man swore a great oath, 'I will kill you, Mr. Gilbert Maryon.'

'No, you will not, unless you wish to see the sheriff, because in such a case he would be sent for immediately.'

'What do you want, then?'

'I want to settle accounts with you. Not to-day. Perhaps to-morrow.'

'How have I injured you?'

'That you will learn when the day of settlement arrives. Look here, Mr. Charles Lee, you are a prisoner in this House. Outside, all round you, you are waited for. You will continue to be a prisoner in this House until you are arrested, or until your death. Yes—until your death. It is all you have to look forward to. Now, Mr. Charles—shall I give you your right name?—go away and wait for the day of settlement—perhaps to-morrow.'

With white face, but with the affectation of carelessness, Charles Lee walked away. Heavens! and only two years before the man was a member of the English Governmen, a statesman, a gentleman of unblemished character!

CHAPTER VII.

A SECOND AND A THIRD MESSAGE.

GILBERT sought no more conversation that afternoon. He wandered about by himself in the grounds and garden and fields belonging to the House. The first curiosity once over, he felt himself out of harmony with the place, for everything jarred upon him: the sight and speech of the man whom he purposed to kill; the presence of that purpose; the postponement of the thing—on account of the vague request of a brain-sick girl, a visionary—lay upon his soul like lead. Why did he put off the thing? He had no right to stay an hour longer in the House;

he should have sought out the man without going into the House—and so on. His spirit was disquieted within him as he strolled about the hedgeless fields. Presently he came upon a stream, a bright shallow stream which babbled with so sparkling a voice and laughed so merrily over the stones that it mocked him; the sunshine mocked him; the clear blue sky mocked him; the fresh breeze mocked him; everything mocked and scoffed at the man who bore about so grievous a burden.

The thing should have been done in a gambling den—in a saloon of desperadoes in the Wild West, if there is any Wild West left; even there it would have been a task heavy enough; but it had to be done in a house of religion. To this quiet peaceful retreat he had come to force a man, perhaps against his will, to mortal combat.

And no other way out of it—none. Even if the man were arrested, tried, and sentenced to a lifelong imprisonment for complicity in

murder and companionship in robbery, his wife would not be free. Nothing, except his death, could set her free. He thought of her tears and of her shame; of the boy, whose name could only be preserved by the death of his father; of his own promise; and so he strengthened himself. Yet his heart was as heavy as lead.

Suddenly while he meditated—not in the Master's sense—a hand was laid upon his shoulder. It was the Master himself. Gilbert turned promptly.

'You, Master? I did not hear your footstep.'

'Worldling!' said the Master, using a word common on the lips of the converted and convinced and the saints in evangelical circles fifty years ago, 'your thoughts were far away from this House. You were back again Outside, as absorbed and entranced as we when we leave the House.'

'I was thinking——'

'Brother Gilbert,' the Master interrupted, 'I have been disturbed in Meditation on your account. I have been moved to rise and seek you out and to speak to you. It is laid upon me to speak to you. First of yourself. Something—I know not what, and I will not ask—troubles you. Something stands between you and the repose which you need. Am I right?'

'You are indeed right. I am deeply troubled.'

'You have not left Outside though you have come here. You come not with crimes upon your soul, like that other Englishman, but with a purpose not yet accomplished. Again, am I right?'

'How did you learn that?'

'Anyone can read trouble and doubt in your eyes. But I have a more certain source of knowledge. When that which you think must be done shall have been done, you will be easier in your mind.'

'I think so. It will be finished.'

'Then, Gilbert, I have a message for you. One for your private ear.'

'A message?'

'From a person whom you know not—yet. Perhaps you will know her—some time or other. A message from her.' His low, soft voice was like music. 'For some reason which as yet I know not she takes an interest in you. She is Cicely's mother, and my very dear friend with whom I hold sweet converse every day.' His voice faltered; his eyes became once more filled with that strange, soft light—of what? Enthusiasm? Credulity? Imposture? Not the last: not imposture. 'She is my oldest friend, my dearest friend, for whose sake her child Cicely is dear to me beyond all earthly things. I say, for her sake; you would say, for her memory. To me it is not memory, because she lives with me still and daily speaks to me.'

'And the message?'

'Yes — the message. "Tell Gilbert Maryon," said Cicely's mother, "that what has to be done may be done without him. Tell him to wait; tell him to believe that what has to be done shall be done without him." That is the message. As I understand it, the time will come soon when the arm of the Lord will be stretched out—when some who now cumber and trouble the earth will cease their troubling. How do you understand it?'

'Why! how should she know? How should anyone—you—Cicely—anyone know anything? She cannot. What does she mean, then?'

'I know nothing, young man. Yet I can read the signs. I do not ask your purpose —I do not ask your Past. There is, however, a plain promise with a plain command, from one who cannot deceive and can foretell. On her heights the future is spread

out before her like a map. This thing, whatever it is, will be done without your aid. Very well, then. You are troubled about the event and your own action in it. Let it trouble you no more. Suffer your mind to be at ease. Believe the promise, obey the command. So all will be well with you.'

The Master turned away and left Gilbert staring after him stupidly.

Now, observe. If one of our friends were to tell us that a telegram had just arrived from a dead man and that it was lying on the study table, we should treat that communication with contempt, and that friend as a person of strong imagination or of unsound mind. Such a thing would not be received seriously in London; I mean, outside one of the Houses of Pretence. Yet when such a message was brought to Gilbert in this House, whose atmosphere was charged with mysterious trances and wonderful ways, he received it with meekness. The man who

gave him the message was a stranger, an acquaintance of twenty-four hours' standing, the friend of a day ; he brought no credentials of veracity, he gave no proof of credibility ; he simply said, 'Behold a miracle : I bring to you a message from the dead. Why they send you the message I do not know.'

Yet Gilbert received the message with meekness — with that rarest of modern virtues. Why ? I suppose it was partly because the atmosphere of the place was so strange and weird ; partly, perhaps, on account of the man who brought the message : a strange, remarkable man, picturesque, persuasive ; a man with a soft voice, with eyes deep set, searching, luminous ; with a high, square forehead ; with white flowing hair. We probably ask ourselves how certain persons—impostors—could ever, under any circumstances, be believed. The things they pretended were incredible and absurd, yet they deceived multitudes, and will still

deceive multitudes so long as they have the persuasive voice, the deep-set eyes, the face of candour, the manner of authority. Cagliostro is a case in point, and, I believe, Mohammed, and the late Mahdi.

With meekness Gilbert received that message. Why, he had already received and obeyed a warning from a girl—to be sure she looked like an angel or a spirit. He was also ready to obey a message given him by a man who looked like a Prophet. He received the message with meekness, and he allowed it to bring him consolation and relief.

'What had to be done would be done without him.' If that were so, really: if that should prove to be so—if he could only believe this—why, the rippling of the stream and the whisper of the breeze would be an echo to the joy of his heart; his soul would lie open once more—not to trance, but to life and light and action. Anything seemed

possible in such a House as this—even a message from the dead: even the postponement at their command of a killing which he persuaded himself would be no murder, but the ordeal by battle.

One must own that, in any case, it was really a remarkable thing for two such messages to be delivered by two persons independently. Certainly the Master could have no suspicion of his intention, nor could the girl.

But another and even a more remarkable thing was to happen in the evening, as you shall hear.

At supper in the evening he sat, as before, opposite his enemy. Mr. Charles Lee retained so much of his English manners that he could and did sit at the table as if at a *table d'hôte*, without the least consciousness of the presence of anybody else: with icy separation he gazed across the table through the body of the man who was going to settle accounts with him.

He sat in silence; he took such food as he desired, and in silence he presently rose and walked out of the hall. But Gilbert was no longer concerned about him. 'What was to be done would be done without him.' There was once a gallant knight who set forth to kill a loathly worm for the sake of a lady. On the way he met a fairy who bade him ride on and see the worm killed, but not by himself. So he marvelled greatly, but rode on with uplifted heart. For though he desired very much the death of the worm, without which the lady could never be happy, he could not choose but bethink him that it was a powerful creature, and one that had already killed many, and that the killing of loathly worms was a kind of poaching, because these creatures were strictly preserved for the hunting of the seigneur. Yet a gallant knight. Gilbert was like his valiancy, with differences: for the mediæval worm was sure to fight on provocation, and this, his modern successor,

might refuse absolutely to fight. In that case, what to do?

After supper, the brothers and sisters, as on the preceding night, changed their positions, but not their seats; leaning back against the table with outstretched feet and folded hands, and heads slightly inclined backwards. Then, as on the evening before, the man at the piano played a stately march, with repetitions and deep-voiced chords; and life and thought went out of the rows of vacuous faces: all but a few were lost to sense and feeling, or understanding. They fell into trance. The restless few—among them was the little woman, now restless, with whom Gilbert had talked in the afternoon—got up and shuffled through their clumsy, ungainly dance on the platform. When they left off and descended, the veil of nothingness fell upon their faces too: they, like the rest, sat without their souls—a strange, uncanny sight.

Then Cicely sprang upon the stage, and with untutored feet performed again her wild fantastic dance. It was not the same dance as that of last night, but it was no less graceful, natural, spontaneous, fantastic. Gilbert watched it with increased interest; for now he understood something of what it meant: it was like listening to a sonata of which one understands a little, and listens to learn more. Last night it was a mere unmeaning dance that he saw. This evening he understood that she was seeking to bring body and mind together into the condition necessary for perfect rest. The rhythmic action of the body signified and accompanied the movement of the mind: first the limbs fell into cadence; then the mind fell into repose as the music grew fainter; lastly, with the whirl swift and simple, the brain dropped into rest absolute. She sank unconscious upon a seat on the platform, her eyes open, her hands folded, her sweet face

vacuous, with none of its ethereal beauty left in it, save of shape and line.

The musician stopped and leaned back against the wall, also in trance. And now the hall was perfectly silent: not a breath, nor a cough, nor the movement of a foot, disturbed the ghostly stillness.

Suddenly, Cicely rose; and, still with folded hands and open eyes that saw nothing, she walked as a somnambulist walks straight through the double file of that enchanted company to Gilbert, as he sat at the end of the table in his place near the door.

'Brother Gilbert,' she said, 'I bring you a message.'

A third message? He gazed into her face: it was lifeless; no gleam of life or sight in those open eyes; her soft, sweet voice was changed: it was now metallic, and though she spoke in low tones her words echoed from wall to wall in the silence of the place.

'My mother sends you a message.'

'Good heavens! Your mother?'

'First, for a token, and to show that it is really my mother who sends it, she bids me tell you that she was in Lucknow, a child of four years, when the English troops relieved the place: and that your father, who was with them, a young lieutenant, took her in his arms and kissed her. That is a token.'

'My father went through the Indian Mutiny, certainly.'

'This is the message. "Tell Gilbert Maryon that what must be done shall be done: but not by him. Bid him put the thing out of his mind. During five weeks longer the sinner shall have time to repent. At the end of that time, what must be done shall be done."'

So saying, Cicely glided back to her seat, still with the somnambulist's certain walk, and the strange fixed gaze of her open eyes.

Again, one remarks that it is, of course,

perfectly impossible for a man of Gilbert's education and antecedents to believe such things. They are too absurd for human reason. That is the way we talk. But there are certain considerations which we overlook. For instance, the condition of mind in which such a message is received. Gilbert was in a highly sensitive, excitable condition. The man he had hunted for two years was in his grasp. He was going to fulfil his pledge ; he was going to set his old friend free. This fact alone made him excited and excitable. Then, in our casual talk, we are apt to forget the influence of voice, eyes, touch, surroundings. This message came to Gilbert, for instance, out of the silence and the stillness of a whole company of men and women entranced, by means of one of that company, herself rapt in an undoubted trance. No message could well come more solemnly. And then, again, one message corroborated its prede-

cessor : Cicely could not know anything of the Master's communication. Yet here was an exact repetition of it. For the moment, at all events, Gilbert believed both messages. All his trouble left him. His eyes saw red no more.

If you please to take the trouble, you may construct a very reasonable explanation of the whole phenomenon. The Master imagined that every day he conversed with his dead friends—that was his fixed craze. Now, he was greatly interested in this pleasant, comely young Englishman who had come thus unexpectedly into the House. He observed—anybody with any penetration could observe—by the usual outward symptoms, that this newcomer was in trouble, or doubt, or anxiety about something. What more probable than that he should imagine a vague message and communicate it himself, believing it to be true? Nothing more natural. As a good child of his generation, Gilbert put the thing,

next morning, in that way ; he wrote it down in his diary, because most men argue best with a pen in hand. And yet, in spite of this rational interpretation, he continued to believe in the message.

Exactly the same thing with Cicely's message. She imagined this message, because, like the Master, she conversed with her dead parents every evening ; she, too, was interested in the new-comer ; she, too, had observed the signs of trouble. She dreamed the message ; half asleep she carried the dream to him.

A perfectly rational explanation, you see. Not a spark of the supernatural about it. Gilbert wrote a short account of the two similar phenomena with this explanation. Much is due to one's self-respect in this age ; but, being a descendant of so many ages which have all believed in the uncanny, he continued to believe in the warning and the command ; he received the former ; he

obeyed the latter; and he said to himself that he disbelieved the whole business.

When the trance was over, he looked for some repetition of the message, some confirmation from Cicely. She made no sign; with the rest of the sisters she filed off to the gynæceum and vanished for the night.

Gilbert, a long way from the repose of meditation, sought his own room. He had the curiosity to look into his neighbour's room: it was again empty. What did the man do all the evening in the dark gardens and the empty workshops of the House? In the middle of the night he was again awakened by belated footsteps in the corridor; they passed his room, they entered his neighbour's room. Mr. Charles Lee, then, came up to bed at the fashionable hour of two. What had he been doing from seven o'clock in the evening until two in the morning? Wickedness, somewhere. Mis-

chief, somewhere. Never mind. In five weeks' time all would be cleared up. So, relying on those two messages, Gilbert went to sleep again.

In the morning he made a curious discovery. When he exchanged his clothes for the livery of the House, he had placed all his money with his watch and a ring or two in a drawer. There were about six hundred dollars in notes and a letter of credit. All the money was gone. 'So,' said Gilbert, 'there is a robber in the House of Meditation.'

It was impossible not to connect the deed with the man named Charles Lee. 'Poor devil!' said Gilbert; 'he has sunk low indeed. But he cannot get away from this House. That is impossible.'

He resolved upon saying nothing, for the moment, about this loss, and so he went downstairs to the morning work.

The man whom he suspected was already

in the garden, rake or hoe in hand, pretending to a zealous performance of his duties. When Cicely walked over from her place to speak with Gilbert, the man gazed suspiciously, his face pale with anxiety. They were talking about him. This he saw quite clearly. Everybody knows when other people are talking about them; some men pretend that they can hear what is said—which we need not believe. He was quite right. The conversation did, in fact, concern this sinful brother.

'My heart has been troubled about you all night, Gilbert,' said the girl seriously.

'It is very good of you to think about me at all. I do not forget what you said last night.'

'What did I say last night? I wish I could say or do anything to remove the trouble.'

'I am not so troubled, I say, Cicely, since I received your message of last night.'

She seemed not to hear. 'The bad influence,' she said, 'is connected with the other Englishman over yonder — the man with a soul as black as night. He has no business here; he belongs to lower levels: in his next world he will be a pig, I think, or a rattlesnake. You know that after death we all go to our own levels. This man fears you, Gilbert, for some reason. I see very plainly that he would do you some harm if he dared. You are very hostile to him, and he knows it. But he cannot get away. I know not why. He would like to fly, but he is afraid.'

'How do you know this, Cicely? Are you a witch?'

'What is a witch? I know because I can read what is written on your face and in your eyes as plainly as any print: and on his face, too. Gilbert, put that purpose of yours out of your mind. Let me try to work upon

that evil spirit of his and to calm him into forgetfulness. Oh! how restless he is! What a terrible punishment it is for wickedness, that one cannot forget! To be tied and chained in the lower levels—oh! it is dreadful!'

'You will never calm that restless spirit, Cicely. But try, by all means—after your mother's message.'

'My mother's message? What message? You keep talking about a message.'

'You gave it to me yourself, Cicely, last night, while you were in trance. Have you forgotten?'

She became greatly agitated. 'Oh, Gilbert! what? I remember nothing of what happens to me in trance. Tell me, Gilbert, exactly what it was. Ah! my mother! She sent herself—my mother—a message to you? Oh! what does it mean that she should think of you?' The tears came into

her eyes. 'Yet she is so good. She thinks of everybody.'

'She says that she knew my father long ago, in India, when she was a child.'

'Oh! Yes, yes—she was born in India; she was in Lucknow when the rebels. . . . Oh! it is wonderful. But the message. Tell me exactly what she said.'

'She said, "That what has to be done will be done, but not by him." That is, by me. "And now he is to put the thing out of his mind. For five weeks longer the man shall have leisure to repent." The man is Brother Charles. "At the end of that time what has to be done will be done." That is the message, Cicely. The Master brought me another to the same effect from your mother.'

'Oh! Through the Master, too! Gilbert, there is some reason—I know not what—why she should give you her protection.

Oh! but you must believe what she says: she cannot deceive you; she is so high that future and past and present are all visible to her. Oh! that my mother should send a message, and to you! Oh! she will look after you now. Oh, Gilbert! oh, how glad I am that you came!'

'But about this message?'

'You must obey—you have no choice. Tell me, Gilbert, you believe it?'

'Belief, my child, in such a thing as this is contrary to reason. The thing is preposterous. It is likewise ridiculous. I have said this to myself a dozen times. Yet, Cicely, I do believe it.'

He took her hand. The other man looked on with a scowl; he could see, but he could not hear—he could see her sweet, earnest face looking up in prayer—and he could see the man's face softening.

'I believe it, dear child. I will obey.

I will wait for five long weeks. And meantime you will talk and tell me things out of your innocence and your faith. These things are too high for me. Let me lean awhile Cicely, on your more stalwart arm.'

END OF VOL. I.

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